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THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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545
A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY
Edited by the Ven. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.
Archdeacon of Norfolk

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS,

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

By the
Right Rev. G. A. CHADWICK, D.D.
Formerly Bishop of Derry and Raphoe

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PREFACE

‘A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY.’ Because ‘every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness’ (2 Tim. iii. 16), therefore the chief object of a devotional commentary must be to exhibit the manner in which inspiration worked for these results.

It is not a commentary in which honest exposition is sacrificed to any supposed interest of edification, as when a truth, however precious, is evolved from a text of which the meaning is not that. It is one in which the detailed examination of critical questions—although, even in the interest of edification itself, such work is all-important—is not aimed at, but rather an examination of the main lines of thought, the march and tendency of the argument, and the connection between the inspired writer’s logic and his exposition.

The writer of this little book has stated the argument as plainly as he knew how, when it was clear to his own mind. When he felt really doubtful (as in the famous question, ‘Testament or Covenant,’

The Epistle to the Hebrews

ix. 15-18), he has not shrunk from laying the difficulty before his readers, holding that no 'devotional' end can be attained by being less than frank.

He has placed at the head of every few verses something which is not quite a paraphrase, and certainly does not pretend to be a new translation. It may perhaps be accused of sharing the faults of both. It has endeavoured, even at the cost of overstatement, to exhibit in English words, what the original is often able to imply by some touch too light and fleeting to be exactly reproduced.

G. A. DERRY AND RAPHOE.

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INTRODUCTION

THE Epistle to the Hebrews is unique, in authorship, ^{A Unique} in style, and in subject. ^{Work.} It can easily be shown that the mind of St Paul had a great influence in producing it. But it is just as easy to prove that St Paul himself did not write it, and could not have done so. In the first verse there are two words which he never employs, and a third which he employs with a different shade of meaning. Nor is it conceivable that he, who strenuously insists that his Gospel is not of man nor by man, and that he is an Apostle having seen the Lord, should have written as one to whom the truth was confirmed by them that heard, and authenticated by their signs and wonders (ii. 4).

Nevertheless it is the work of some member of ^{Pauline.} the Pauline school. The resemblances to his style are striking, and only to be reconciled with the striking differences by the belief that it was the writing of a disciple who treasured lovingly his master's thought, and even at times reproduced his phrases, while his individuality remained unimpaired.

And this is edifying as well as interesting. We ^{Another} see the great convictions by which the Apostle lived, ^{Testimony.} the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Intercession of our Lord, faith, justification and judgment, influenc-

The Epistle to the Hebrews

ing another mind, taking new form and colour, expressing themselves otherwise, finding other support in the Old Testament, and yet continuing to be essentially the same. It is a fine example of how much difference in statement, how much originality and independence, are consistent with a loving allegiance to the same Gospel.

The truths by which we live will resound through the depths of our individuality: it is only those to which we give a tame assent that we shall tamely reproduce as we received them.

The Epistle to the Hebrews may abound in Pauline words and proof texts: the traces of Paul's influence may lie everywhere upon the surface of it; yet as we read it we shall know that it is another great soul which is addressing ours, and unveiling fresh and profound realities of the Gospel.

A Different
Intelligence.

It is indeed, with all its discipleship, and loyalty to the common truth, a curiously different intelligence. Less eager and passionate than the master, it is more balanced and antithetical and much more rhetorical. One speaks of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God: the other, at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens. St Paul tells us that the Jew had much advantage every way, 'first—' but this first advantage carries him so far, that he does not return to tell us of any second. This Epistle methodically proves the superiority of Christ, first to the angels, and then to Moses, and thus clears its way to the main theme, His superiority to the Aaronic priesthood: it formally announces each proposition in turn before proving it; and after

Introduction

proving, applies it to the conscience with an exhortation.

Few things are more difficult than to make a satisfactory *precis* of an Epistle of St Paul, and many readers take to themselves the comfort of this text and that, without any glimmer of perception of its place in a connected argument—which is nevertheless there, though unsuspected. But no one fails to recognise the stately progress of thought in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Most remarkable of all is the central theme itself **The Priest.**—the Priesthood of Christ after the order of Melchizedek. That our Lord does for us what it was the function of a priest to do—this is familiar to every reader of St Paul. But he never once connects it with the function of a priest, and never quotes the text which lay so ready for his controversial purposes, which thrusts aside the Aaronic priesthood and replaces it with another imperishable order. This is remarkable indeed. It shows how completely this Hebrew of Hebrews had broken with his past ways of thought and worship.

It shows the range and amplitude of the Gospel, that so much of the significance of the Old Dispensation would have remained unstated—though plainly implied—were it not for the Epistle to the Hebrews.

HEBREWS I

1. God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

2. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds ;

3. Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high ;

4. Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

5. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee ? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son ?

6. And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

7. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

8. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever : a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

9. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity ; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

10. And Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth ; and the heavens are the works of thine hands :

11. They shall perish ; but thou remainest ; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment ;

12. And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed : but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

13. But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool ?

14. Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ?

I

GREATER THAN THE ANGELS

¹ God having of old times spoken unto the fathers Hebrews in the prophets by sundry portions and in divers ^{i.} manners, ² hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by Whom also He made the ages, ³ Who being the effulgence of His glory and the very image of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power.

The same God, having long ago spoken unto the fathers in the prophets, not through their lips as through a passive instrument, but in them as in vital agents, nor ever perfectly, since no such agent could utter his whole message, no, but in fragments, as the comprehension of each lesson prepared the scholars for the next, and in divers manners (by types and laws, prophecies, histories and legends) now, when such days are ending (at the dawn of a new age) spake to us decisively and finally, in One Who differs from those messengers of fragmentary truth, being His Son.

The Author
of both
Testaments.

The growth of grace in men is progressive: the children of the Kingdom are good seed. So is the

The Law of
Develop-
ment.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews i. vocation of the Church : it has learned to war in succession against slavery, torture, ignorance, not only to defend but to assert the full rights of woman and of the poor ; and it is almost half awake to its duty toward the heathen. The doctrine of development was recognised earlier in religion than in physics. More than this, the faith of Christ is itself a development. The New Covenant is not entirely new ; it is the unfolding and spiritualising of principles which lay implicit in the Old, as colour and fragrance lurk in an unopened bud.

The Function of the Old Testament.

1. Transitional.

2. Preparatory.

Now this Epistle, more than any except perhaps that to the Galatians, affirms the absolute repeal, and even to us the worthlessness of the old system. It decayeth and waxeth old, and is ready to vanish away. It is weak and unprofitable. Even in its day it made nothing perfect. It would have been easy for such a teacher to disparage it overmuch. But there was a Spirit in him to reveal its real function. It was, according to St Paul, the slave who led the child to his true teacher Christ, and carried his books and slate for him (Gal. iii. 24). It made nothing perfect, but was the bringing in of a better hope, says this Epistle. It was preparatory, educational. And to discharge its office, it had to be line upon line and precept upon precept.

Many difficulties vanish if we remember this. The fierce indignation which refused quarter to the Canaanites, and which burns in the Imprecatory Psalms, is not for us. It was indignation against the bad, when the Gospel which might reclaim the worst was not yet ready, nor men ready to receive

Greater than the Angels

it. Some commandments were given because of Hebrews the hardness of men's hearts. And if we ask 'How ^{i.} then shall we discriminate? What is superseded? What is permanent?' there is a distinct answer. That is permanent which has been taken up into the New Dispensation and assimilated there. ^{3. Assimilated.} And this message, we read, came in fragments, and by various devices, which statement is an apt introduction for what follows concerning Priest and Sacrifice, the Veil and the Holiest place of all.

But the process was now closing. The God Who ^{The Early Date.} thus spake long ago, spoke to us, we read, at the close of these days, that is to say, when the epoch of progressive revelation is coming to an end, and a new age about to open. The old order is giving place to new. There are still priests who offer according to the law. Judaism is not gone, but it is ready to vanish away. In other words, this Epistle was written just before the destruction of Jerusalem, and prepared its readers for the shock of that great catastrophe. It cannot have been written, therefore, later than the year 70.

No one writing later could have spoken as it speaks about the danger of returning to Judaism, nor have abstained from pointing his argument by the fact that Hebrew sacrifices were at an end and the Hebrew priesthood paralysed.

It follows that the unique position of the Master ^{Christ is already adored.} in this Epistle belongs to the earliest period; and it is vain to explain it by any mythical or legendary influences working even forty years after the Crucifixion.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews i. Let us see, then, what rank was assigned to Jesus by the common consent of the author and his readers.

His Nature Divine. One Whose Nature is identical with His own, derived from it, a Son, Whom therefore He hath appointed to possess all things, not as an arbitrary gift but by virtue of His relationship, and as an inheritance ; Who was His agent in the making of all the ages [all successions alike of physical phenomena and of progressive beliefs], Who was therefore before them all, begotten from everlasting and not made ; Who was to God as the rays are to the sun, wherein all its splendour is apparent, and as the stamp in the wax is to the seal, answering to it line by line ; Who was not only the agent in all creation from the first, but also the upholder of it all by the same word which at the beginning spake and it was done, the word of His own power.

Such is Christ. Such is the revelation of God speaking in Him, in contrast with what the prophets uttered periodically and in fragments. He reveals God, as the rays outstreaming from the sun reveal all its glory ; or as the impress of a signet ring reveals every line carved upon it. And as we can conceive of an eternal Sun,—though we know this to be a mere conception—but not of a Sun without its radiance ; so it is quite rational to conceive of a Son eternal as the Father is, yet deriving His existence throughout eternity from the Father. As He

He works in Providence.

was the Agent of all creation, so He is of Providence—the cycles of Geology, the dispensations of religion are His work—and the same voice which said, Let

Greater than the Angels

there be light, and the light was, calls the dawn Hebrews every morning into the eastern skies, and upholdeth i. all things by the word of His power. All this is meant to intensify our estimate of Christ the Revealer. He is behind and above all. It is His own work. He can explain it perfectly. He is the final utterance of God: His day is the last time.

At this point a new thought emerges. The soul requires something more than light. Merely to understand might be to despair.

³ *Having made* (by one act, not by a process) *a purification of sins* (in their aggregate), *seated Himself* (officially, and once for all, since His work was complete) *on the right hand of the Majesty in the high places.* ⁴ *Having become* (in office and history, what He had always been by right of His personality) *so much better* (in position) *than the Angels, as He hath inherited a more excellent Name than they.*

‘In the beginning the Word was . . . and the Word became flesh,’ wrote the Evangelist. So here we read first what the Son essentially and ever was—the full blaze of the Divine Splendour—and what His abiding function, as the Upholder of the Universe and the Revealer to it of God; and then of His action in history, His treatment of human lapse and condemnation, and the consequent exaltation of His humanity. His making purification of sins will prove to be the central theme of the Epistle. Enough to observe now that it is the inspired summary of His whole work on earth. Not the

He works in History.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews i. setting of a beautiful example, not the alluring of us back from the wilderness by the charm of His love, but the purging away of sin—and the phrase distinctly implies that He dealt with the sum-total of transgression—this was the meaning of His life below. When this was done, He took His seat in that place where the kneeling cherubim veil their faces.

His Supremacy. This is the formal statement of one of the fundamental propositions of the Book. He has become so much better than the Angels. He is worthy of more glory than Moses. He is a Priest for ever. It is hard to see how anyone can doubt the divinity of the Lord while accepting the assertion that His enthronement beside God is the measure of His superiority over the angels; and that it came to Him at the ascension by virtue of the rank He already owned as His inheritance. He is not said to have 'become better' in any ethical sense: it is the same word as when we read again that 'the less is blessed of the better' (vii. 7); and the ambiguity is precisely parallel with our own use of the word 'superior.' This phrase, 'having become better than the Angels,' is the antithesis of that in the next chapter—'made lower than the Angels for a little while' (ii. 9).

⁵ *For, unto which of the Angels saith He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I Myself begotten Thee* (Ps. ii. 7)? *and again, I will be to Him a Father and He shall be to Me a Son* (2 Sam. vii. 14), ⁶ *and when He again* (as a new step in the process) *bringeth the Firstborn into the world* (into that over

Greater than the Angels

which He had hitherto presided, the administration, Hebrews the ordered course of things) *He saith, and let all the i. Angels of God worship Him* (Ps. xcvi. 7, lxx.; Deut. xxxii. 43, lxx.).

‘Unto which of the Angels?’ No such title, the Greater than the Angels. verse means to say, is given to distinguish any individual Angel. It is true that the Angels collectively are called Sons of God (Ps. xxix. 1; lxxxix. 6), and so is that nation which was a type of the Messiah, and because it was a type of Him (Hos. xi. 1). So too the promise in the second quotation was made primarily to Solomon, who also typified the Prince of Peace, and who, for his own part, by transgression, left the promise unenjoyed. These shadowy approximations, like our own relationship to God (so dear, yet only adoptive at the best), what are they to the emphatic ‘MY SON art Thou,’ and to the great assertion ‘I Myself have begotten Thee’? Here only in this Epistle God is called by the name of ‘Father,’ but it is implied, and implied for us, in the question, What Son is He Whom the Father chasteneth not? It is said This day have I begotten Thee, and not in the infinite past, because the relationship is eternal. Thus also Jesus Himself made the assertion in the present tense, ‘The Father loveth the Son and showeth Him all things. . . . Whatsoever He seeth the Father do, the same doeth the Son likewise.’

This clearly asserted truth must not be set aside without attention, because it is mysterious. This much at least we can see clearly, that love, and the mutual joy of giving and receiving, lie far beyond

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews i. creation, enshrined eternally in the very nature of the Deity.

He Who was the 'Effulgence of His splendour' is the incarnate love of God, shining into our hearts.

⁷ And of the Angels He saith, Who maketh His Angels winds and His ministers flame of fire (Ps. ciii. 4). ⁸ But to the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom (Ps. cv. 6).

God in Nature.

To the Son He has given His own Name: the Angels are called by the name of the wild and strong forces of the universe, storm and fire. For God is in nature: His agents work the changes which we call elemental: our faith needs only to be a little stronger, and we should own the work of mysterious and holy Beings in the tornado that sweeps the ocean, and the volcano that shakes the world.

Christ enthroned above Nature.

Wind and fire, so intermittent, changeful, and with such mixed result, while they change, He is for ever; and while they are messengers He sitteth on the throne judging aright. He is eternal, but they are created things. '*He maketh His Angels winds.*'

Some difficulty has been raised about the phrase 'Thy throne, O God.' It is undeniable that these words are a grammatical and natural rendering both of the Hebrew and the Greek. It will scarcely be asserted that apart from doctrine any other would have been thought of. And it is certain also that the rendering 'Thy throne is God for ever and ever' introduces a notion strange in itself, without any parallel in Scripture, and especially unsuitable when we have

Greater than the Angels

just learned that He sits at the right hand of God. Hebrews It is enough to add that words entirely capable of i. the higher meaning would never have been addressed, in such a context, to any mere mortal or mere creature.

And yet this great Being has accepted a place within the Universe which He governs. We shall presently have to consider much fuller statements of His voluntary partnership with man, His share in human conflict and temptation, but this is already implied in the verse which follows:—

⁹ Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.

Into the midst of a demonstration of Christ's inherent superiority comes the mention of conflict,—a wickedness to be hated and enemies who shall become His footstool—and in the act of learning how much He was above the Angels we are taught that men are His fellows. This is the first hint of the great His doctrine of atoning condescension which forms the 'Fellows.' central part of the Epistle. A great commentator says indeed that neither men nor Angels are specified as His fellows, because the intention is to include both. But this is surely wrong, for when the idea is expanded, we read that He taketh not hold of Angels (for their rescue), but of the seed of Abraham He taketh hold (ii. 16).

So, then, the Supreme is here revealed as condescending to the limitations of the creature, and not His 'joy.' for pain only but also for its compensations. And

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews i. since the highest and purest nature must always be the most sensitive, and sin degrades and makes callous, therefore, at the enthronement of our elder Brother, the consecrated oil of joy which anointed Him was far above all other joy. Who shall say how far? His humanity is filled and flooded with conscious participation with the Divine. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising shame.

Another citation follows, which has to do, not with the rapture of His mortal victory, but with His eternal pre-existence and immutability.

¹⁰ Thou, Lord, at the first didst found the earth ; and the heavens are works of Thy hands. ¹¹ They shall perish ; but Thou abidest ; and they all shall grow old as a garment ; ¹² and as a robe shalt Thou fold them up, as a garment, and they shall be changed ; but Thou art the same and Thy years shall not fail.

Unchanged
amid
Mutations.

He said, 'I am the first and the last.' At the first He created all that is. Through the ages we have been taught that He upholdeth all things by the word of His power. Now we learn that what seems like wreck and ruin is not the failure of His providence, but its entrance upon other processes : at the end He shall transform it all. Nothing is really spoiled. When the material universe is spoken of alone, we seem to read a death-sentence : 'They shall perish' ; but when He is taken into account, these things are as a precious robe which He folds up, and they shall not be destroyed but changed. Amid

Greater than the Angels

these changes He remains. It is not written that Hebrews He shall abide, He shall be the same, for the soul of i. that Timeless Immutability has passed into the phrase; and as Jehovah said to Moses I AM, so it is written, Thou remainest: Thou art the same.

¹³ *Unto which of the Angels said He at any time, Sit thou on My right hand until I plant thine enemies a footstool of thy feet (Ps. cx. 1).* ¹⁴ *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth unto service (which they render to God) through them that shall inherit salvation?*

Where are the Angels bidden to sit enthroned while God vindicates their cause for them? It is the reverse: they are, from time to time as need arises, sent as messengers upon God's service. And this service is rendered to Him through us: what they do for the saints He accepts as done for Him; even as Christ has declared that He accepts our service of one another. The Angels serve.

The dignity of Christ's people, by virtue of which this is so, is expressed in a subtle and beautiful phrase. Christ is inheritor of all things. He hath received by inheritance a more excellent name than they. Now an inheritance is the natural expression for what is given, not to reward labour, nor as the spoil of battle, nor as an alms from mere compassion, but freely and by reason of a tie which the heart has owned. We are thus to inherit salvation. And He who admits us to this privilege sends high messengers from other worlds to deliver us from danger known or unknown, from the crafts and assaults of Satan, Our Inheritance.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews i. and to lead us to that homeland of all His people where at last salvation shall be perfected.

In the Revelation St John saw them busy upon this task, crying, 'Hurt not the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.' And such service we are told is rendered by them 'all.' Surely we are reminded of the angels of tempest and of flame, so lately mentioned, and are taught that salvation comes not only when all is benign and calm: that the height is not ours more truly than the depth, nor life than death; but all alike are ours if we are Christ's.

Wherefore, the second chapter says, Let us see that this is so.

HEBREWS II

1. Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

2. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward ;

3. How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation : which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him ;

4. God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will ?

5. For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.

6. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him ? or the son of man, that thou visitest him ?

7. Thou madest him a little lower than the angels ; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands :

8. Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him :

9. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour ; that he by the Grace of God should taste death for every man.

10. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

11. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one : for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

12. Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren : in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

13. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.

14. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same ; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ;

15. And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

16. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels ; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

17. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

18. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

II

PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERINGS

Hebrews
ii.

¹ *Therefore we have need to apply ourselves more exceedingly to the things heard, lest perchance we should drift away from them.* ² *For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just retribution,* ³ *how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which, having at the first begun to be spoken by the Lord was confirmed unto us by those who heard Him,* ⁴ *God also co-operating-in-testimony by signs and wonders and various powers, and distributions of the Holy Ghost according to His will.*

It is the manner of St Paul to establish his whole argument consecutively in the body of each epistle, and to close with his formal appeal to the conscience and life of the reader. In this epistle, as each point is made good, it is separately and at once driven home, and these warnings increase in vehemence from the first until we are reminded that we have not come to the mount which burned, but unto God who is Himself a consuming fire.

The First
Warning.

The first warning is against carelessness. We are heirs of salvation, and the angels are sent to minister unto us. Shall we then assume that religion has

Perfect through Sufferings

become a very easy thing, and faith need be little Hebrews more than a sunny consciousness that all is well? ii. Much teaching in our own day comes perilously near to this.

But such is not the doctrine of this book. Because salvation is so great a gift, it claims our most strenuous attention; and of all dangers to the Christian, the most persistent, and the first to be mentioned here, is precisely that of being at ease in Zion, of allowing the soul to remove itself, by almost imperceptible degrees, from prayerfulness, meditation, communion, trust in the unseen. Like a fading picture, imperceptibly at any given moment, the conception of salvation becomes colourless, vague, and ineffectual. More souls are wrecked by drifting, easily and unconsciously, a little and again a little further from their moorings and the anchor of the soul, than are overwhelmed by tempestuous passion.

Be sure that the Christian life is intense and earnest, the exact reverse of drifting, as so many drift, as the breeze wafts, as the current draws them. The Epistle repeats this exhortation in many forms. By faith and patience the promise is inherited: we must run a race: we must leave the first principles and go on: all is not achieved while we have not yet resisted unto blood.

And to urge us forward, we are shown the greatness of our privilege. The former covenant was law, precept, a 'word spoken,' although spoken by the angels of God. But the gift of the New Covenant is not a law; it is Salvation. If then the former was 'firm,' what of that which is 'made firm' for us

Gifts are
Responsi-
bilities.

Our
Privilege.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews ii. by the actual hearers of the Lord, and by God Himself co-operating in testimony with them, as St Mark declares in almost identical words, 'They preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with the signs.'¹

Penalties. Those who by open action transgressed the law—nay those who by inattention culpably misconceived it (for 'disobedience' is literally 'mis-hearing')—endured a strictly proportionate penalty. What of us, then, if we neglect—for the question is still simply of drifting—if we neglect, not precepts but salvation, and so great salvation that Christ Himself, and the Apostles who proclaimed Him, and the Holy Spirit of God, and God, Who distributed His spirit in prophecy and tongues and interpretations and manifold endowments—all were co-operand in its promulgation?

Great Salvation. 'Salvation' began to be spoken by the Lord; salvation was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him, and by God working with them; and salvation includes everything which the most vehement energy and burning faith can attain. For it is evident that

¹ Nothing can be clearer than the testimony of this verse that signs and wonders, and abiding powers of which these were the outcome, and distributions of the Holy Ghost, actually existed among the first readers of this Epistle. This, it argues, is their privilege, surpassing the privilege of Israel. Now what could be the state of mind of a writer who strove by such means to impress readers who knew nothing of any such phenomena? And what sort of readers, upon this hypothesis, were they who treasured up, as inspired, an Epistle thus self-refuted? Observing this, we also have the evidence of those 'signs.' To complain that they have not become a permanent endowment of the Church, is virtually to ask for the benefit of the same evidence twice over.

Perfect through Sufferings

a complete salvation must completely reverse the Hebrews Fall. Not only to be purged from our old sins, or ii. even from the haunting recurrence of suggestions due to habit, not only to be rid of the fears and doubts of inexperienced and inadequate faith, but to be progressively redeemed from all that mars the ideal of humanity, created in the image of God,—this is salvation. It is not the work of a day, still less of dreamy indolence. It belongs not to him who, without misgiving, drifts on a helmless vessel, but to him who with girded loins runs the race which is set before him.

And let us take this to heart, that overt transgression and disobedience in the Old Dispensation are set against mere neglect and drifting in the New.

⁵ For not unto angels did He subject the coming Dispensation, concerning which we speak; ⁶ but one hath testified somewhere saying, What is man, that Thou rememberest him, or a son of man that Thou visitest him? ⁷ Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownest him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of Thy hands: ⁸ Thou didst set all things under his feet (Ps. viii. 4-6), for in that He subjected 'all things' unto him, He left nothing unsubjected unto him. But now we see not yet this subjection of all things unto him. But we behold Him, made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, through the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
ii.

The Destiny
of Man.

The greatness of our calling warns us to be true to it; but of this greatness, of the splendour of our 'great salvation,' one crowning proof has been hitherto reserved. The destiny of man himself is greater than that of angels: God has put the universe under his feet. Not unto angels has He subjected the new and crowning order of things, the world as an organic system of administration, the age that was approaching over the ruins of the ancient system. This He has put under man.

The Eighth
Psalm.

The Eighth Psalm is a pastoral: the singer looked at the moon and stars and felt how small is man, how helpless among the forces of nature. But this lowly creature was admitted to have relations with the Divine; God visited him. And God at the beginning bade him to subdue the earth and have dominion. Then the wave of inspiration lifted the singer higher than he knew, and while he thought of all sheep and oxen, cattle and fowl of the air, he spoke the great words, 'Thou madest him to have dominion over the work of Thy hands: Thou hast put all things under him.' And the inspiration of the New Testament receives frankly and to the full this utterance of the inspiration of the Old.

Too often we accept as the best interpretation of sacred words their irreducible minimum of meaning. This Epistle does not so. It accepts the plain meaning of plain words. It understands that man is called to be supreme creature. But we do not find him so. He complains that he is the sport of circumstances: through fear of death he is all his life-time subject to bondage. All things are not put under him.

Perfect through Sufferings

What we are not, but may aspire to be, we already **Hebrews** behold in One. The name 'Jesus' stands alone ^{ii.} here (and very frequently in this Epistle, which treats 'Jesus.' of Christ's purely human function as Priest of humanity), because it is His purely human name, the name by which the villagers of Nazareth called the Son of Mary. He exhibits already the supremacy of man, having first stooped to manhood. By Him, as we have seen, the worlds were made, and He was by inheritance higher than the angels. But we behold Him, first made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death and then crowned with glory and honour that by the grace of God His tasting of death should be for every man, since He is the 'Captain' and the representative of all.

Some expressions in this passage ought not to be left unnoticed. The marvel of Christ's condescension is expressed by a change of words: 'We see not yet all things . . . but we behold Jesus': this has fixed our attention: we no longer look with sad listlessness: we gaze.

And it is not death only which we are to think of: He 'tasted' it is 'the suffering of death'; and the bitterness of ^{Death.} it is 'tasted,' no anodyne benumbs this anguish--though perhaps the second expression would also remind us how comparatively brief a time our Lord was 'holden of it.' Surely this efficacious and redeeming pain throws a lurid light upon that so-called Christian Science which declares all pain to be illusory, and due to a culpable failure of the sufferer's faith. If so, Christ died in vain.

Again, He is said to have tasted death 'on behalf

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Hebrews ii. of every man.' He Himself used a stronger phrase, and said that He came to give His life a ransom in exchange for many (Matt. xx. 28 ; Mark. x. 45).

Death as an Object. Both contexts imply with deliberate intention, that His death was undertaken as an object, a work. 'The Son of man came to give His life.' 'He by the grace of God tasted death for every man.' Now this is strange and unique, but it pervades the whole of the New Testament. From the first, the followers of Jesus have rejoiced in His death: they and we commemorate with a feast the breaking of His body and the shedding of His blood. Can we suppose England celebrating the death of Nelson if nothing else had happened, no crushing of hostile navies, no destruction of the resources for invasion? Only the death of Jesus happened upon that day which we call Good Friday.

¹⁰ For it became Him for Whom are all things and through Whom are all things, bringing many Sons unto glory, to make perfect the Author of their salvation through sufferings. ¹¹ For He Who sanctifieth and they who are being sanctified are all from One, through which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹² saying, I will declare Thy name to My brethren; in the midst of the Church I will sing Thee (Ps. xxii. 22). ¹³ And again, I (Myself) will put My trust in Him, and again, Behold I and the children whom God hath given Me.

The Glory of the Cross. Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block. Therefore the writer, having spoken of suffering and death as the price of our deliverance,

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anticipates the offence of the cross. But it is not **Hebrews** enough to warn us against rejecting this lowly way ^{ii.} of salvation; we are bidden to admire it, as well befitting Him, of Whom are all things and through Whom are all things. This remarkable expression includes pain and sorrow among His creatures, His disciplinary agents, which it was not fit, even if it were possible, for Him who accepted our nature to reject. The object was to bring many sons unto glory, an unusual epithet for our hope—that glory with which the Son is crowned, and of which we have already learned that He was the effulgence.

Thus, in the act of declaring that we also are Sons, the distinction between Him and us is very sharply drawn. He is the Author of salvation, we are in process of being saved: He is the Sanctifier, we are being sanctified. Evidence is marshalled to prove that He is not ashamed to call us brethren. Even as brethren we need his intercession, and He has compassion on us. He is either called the Author or the Captain of our salvation. Now which of these titles shall we prefer? Neither of them quite covers the field of the original, which implies that first He Himself became that which He made it possible for others to become. He is the Inaugurator. And how could Christ be such, unless He trod where we should follow? The Leader would fail to lead such as we are, unless He were a sufferer. Moreover—and this is a saying which has caused perplexity to many—He was Himself made perfect Christ 'made Perfect. through suffering. The very notion that ever, in any sense, Christ could have been imperfect, is repellent

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews ii. to us. And yet we must not, by way of explaining this great assertion, explain it away. It is simple and easy to say (and it is true) that by suffering He was perfectly equipped for His office, and certainly the word translated 'perfect' has often this more modest meaning. When we are bidden to be children in malice but in understanding men (1 Cor. xiv. 20), the literal rendering is, 'in understanding perfect,' but the meaning is 'full grown,' and no one has, in any stronger sense, a perfect understanding.

But we must feel that the writer of the Epistle has ethical growth in view. He deliberately ascribes to our Lord incarnate ('Partaker in flesh and blood') a necessary progress by experience. He learned obedience (which is a moral quality) by the things which He suffered. In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able also to succour them that are tempted. And such growth, if we consider it, is inseparable from a genuine humanity. A real child cannot at the same time be a real man: inexperience, and its filial duty of dependence, is the prelude to experience with its duties, its possibilities, of self-reliance. Because the second of these is the more mature and perfect, therefore it can be asserted that Jesus increased in favour with God (Luke ii. 52). But there was no deficiency from the right standard of its own being, in the first any more than the final stage. Every day the perfect Boy moved forward a full day's journey toward perfect manhood, increasing in wisdom as in stature, and through the experiences of manhood attaining the perfect sympathies which are required for Priesthood.

Perfect through Sufferings

If this bold assertion is still disquieting to any, let **Hebrews** him reflect that inspiration represents this process to **ii.** be necessary, only for our sake, only as the Captain of our salvation; and between Him and all other humanity this deep line is drawn that He is the Sanctifier and we are (by a continuous process) being sanctified. Moreover it is by virtue, not of a common nature (until He voluntarily assumes it), but only of a common origin that He calls us brethren, because we 'are all of One,' however in ourselves unlike.

¹⁴ Forasmuch then as the children shared blood and flesh, He also Himself in like manner partook of these, that through death He might abolish him that hath the power of death, that is the devil,¹⁵ and might deliver those all who through fear of death were through their whole life subject to bondage.

The sense grows upon us while we read of the underlying difference between us and Him Who thus takes our nature. Human life is not His first condition: because it is ours He 'partook' of it, like one who is partaker at a meal. (It is this word which tells us that we are all partakers of one bread, and that every one who partakes of milk is a babe.) It would be absurd to say of any other, however illustrious, of Plato or of St John, that he partook of flesh and blood because other men possessed them. Still more absurd it would be, to declare of any that he assumed these with deliberate intention, for the sake of what he should accomplish in our mortal life. But Christ took flesh for the sake of what He should

He 'partook
of' Flesh
and Blood.

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Hebrews ii. achieve by dying—‘through death.’ He rescues us without a weapon, except the endurance of all that the weapon of the enemy can inflict. ‘Herein is the wonder,’ says Chrysostom, ‘that Satan is worsted by that by which he overcame.’

The ‘Fear of Death.’ As yet, Christ is not said to destroy death; but so to alter our position in regard to it as to destroy him who by the fear of death enslaved us. But is it true that all men cower under the shadow of a sentence so dark, so persistent through their whole existence, that for it, and in this Epistle for it alone, is employed the image, elsewhere so familiar, of slavery to a tyrant? Is it so? There is no man living whose whole scheme of life is not profoundly modified by the shortness of it. There is no domestic happiness that has not felt the chill of the knowledge that death shall part what seems inseparable. The dreams of a fountain of youth, of an elixir of life, express man’s longing to escape from it. Men have gone to the scaffold without a visible tremor, and yet died of the reaction when reprieved. Insufficient as our faith is, no one who has seen abroad the difference between pagan and Christian funerals will ever again depreciate the work of missions, the power of Christ to deliver them who through fear of death were all their lives subject to bondage. Death still exists, but life and death are ours.

¹⁶ *For He verily taketh not hold of the nature of angels, but of a seed of Abraham He taketh hold.*

¹⁷ *Wherefore He was bound in all things to be made*

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like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful Hebrews and faithful High-priest in the things that have to do ii. with God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ *For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able also to succour them that are being tempted.*

It has been much discussed whether the sixteenth ^{'He taketh Hold.'} verse means to say that Christ Himself assumes humanity, or that He grasps and so helps it in its weakness. The Incarnation is so prominent in the context, that we need fear nothing if we do not find it here. But the fact that Christ helps humanity is no valid proof that He must Himself perfectly resemble man; while His taking of our nature is a good reason why His identification with us should be perfectly carried out. And again it seems less fitting to say that He helps not the nature of angels than simply that He helps angels; but it is much more natural to say that He assumes not the nature of angels.

He takes our nature then in all its weakness, that ^{The High-priest.} He may be a merciful and faithful High-priest. It is said that He taketh on Him 'a seed of Abraham,' who is the Father of the Faithful, and not with the definite article 'the seed,' because the thought is not only of Abraham's natural descendents, but of his seed in the widest signification of the phrase.

At this point there emerges the great conception of Christ as High-priest, making a propitiation for sins, the main subject of this book, the theme which is elaborated throughout the central portion of it, and

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Hebrews ii. which indeed is all its own. We shall presently have to consider what is involved, what is the essential differentiating thought, in priesthood, but here it is simply mentioned as a crowning reason why Christ should bear our flesh. To plead our cause He must feel with us and be true to us, a merciful and faithful High-priest. So fallen are we that we need this in "the things," all and not some things, which relate to God. And Christ is such a priest. Having known the stress of temptation, He is able to succour those on whom temptation is pressing now. But what words could more clearly convey the assertion that His own temptations left Him scatheless, who is competent to be the propitiation for ours?

HEBREWS III

1. Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;

2. Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

3. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.

4. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.

5. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after;

6. But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

7. Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear his voice,

8. Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

9. When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

10. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.

11. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)

12. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

13. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

14. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;

15. While it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

16. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.

17. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness?

18. And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?

19. So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

III

GREATER THAN MOSES

Hebrews iii. ¹ *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High-priest of our profession, Jesus.*

The Second Warning. Again for a moment we pass from argument to exhortation. Since the Lord has been recognised as our Sanctifier (the Author of holiness in man) and as our Brother, we are addressed as Holy Brethren, and sharers in a heavenly calling, as we read elsewhere, a 'calling from above in Christ Jesus' (Phil. iii. 14). Already bidden to give earnest heed to things which we have heard, we are now to pass from things to that which is the soul of the Christian faith, our Lord Himself. Him we are to consider as Apostle and as High-priest, reciprocal offices, in one of which He speaks for God to us, and in the other for us to God, so that the combination renders Him a perfect Mediator.

Christ 'the Apostle.'

In no other place is Jesus called an Apostle ;¹ and since Angel and Apostle mean the same, we might have looked for the loftier term, which is apparently given to Him in the Old Testament, and

¹ The verb 'to send,' from which comes the noun which we render Messenger, Apostle, is not seldom used of Him, *e.g.*, Matt. xv. 24, Mark ix. 37, Luke. iv. 18, John xvii. 18.

Greater than Moses

repeatedly to his Forerunner in the New. It is Hebrews commonly said to have been avoided as tending to iii. weaken the contrast already drawn between Him and angels. But there is more : the word Apostle, after all, expresses the office of a man : Angel does not ; and the choice of the former presses home on us that human nature in which Christ brought to us the message of His Father.

We shall not rightly 'consider' Him as Apostle, until we remember the fidelity, pathos and homeliness of His teaching, the blessings He scattered with both hands, and His long endurance of sinners against Himself, until we reflect upon the gentle majesty with which He revealed the Father, and remind ourselves that all His ministry was for us in the twentieth century as truly as for Galilee and Judæa in the first.

But what is the meaning of a high-priest ? First, **What is a Priest ?** what is a priest, since the high-priest is simply this in its fullest development, according to the Hebrew ritual ? The essence of priesthood was not the slaying of sacrifices, which in fact was often done by others : it was the presenting of the offering to God ; and, for this purpose, the right of access to His presence. The office was an inevitable expression of two universal emotions, and an endeavour to reconcile them ; a sense of unworthiness recoiling from any approach to God, and yet an irresistible craving to draw near. From the first, it was only through their noblest that men came to Him ; the father, the chief, the king, each in his sphere acted as a priest. The priesthood of the king has struck

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**Hebrews
iii.** deep roots into more than one language. But the time came when king and people alike felt that even he must not dare to present himself before God : the sense of sin was too strong for him ; and men were separated entirely for this purpose from the defilements of common life.

**Exclusion
from God.** It was an embodied confession of the sinfulness of the race, a pitiable endeavour to keep some few men pure enough to be inoffensive to deity. And since the knowledge of sin was by the law, this expression of man's banishment came to a head in Judaism, with veiled court behind court, with sacrifices and lustrations for the priest himself before he might presume to act for others ; and above all, with the ceremonies of that awful day when only one, the chief Priest, in a robe which was not that of his glory, penetrated to the inmost shrine, while, without, the people listened for the tinkling of the bells he wore, to tell them that he still lived (Exod. xxviii. 33). Priesthood was the most concrete and vivid expression of the exclusion of man from God.

**Representa-
tion before
God.** Yet it hinted, on the other hand, that our banishment was neither complete nor final. No stranger of a nobler race, but our brother was thus admitted ; he appeared for us ; he was chosen from among his brethren. Nor was Levi recorded to have been selected for special worth, but the reverse : a gross offence had forfeited his inheritance among the tribes ; and he was thereupon given this office for his inheritance. The Priest was therefore simply one of us, and acted for us ; so that we were in a sense admitted where he

Greater than Moses

went. As we study this epistle we shall find this Hebrews thought again and again enforced. 'Chosen from iii.
among men' 'ordained for men'—surely the hope must have dawned upon many a Jew, which is justified so splendidly when we read that 'our Fore-runner is for us entered'—'let us therefore come with boldness to the throne of grace.'

Now the Apostle and the High priest of our confession (that is of the Christian faith) is Jesus.

We have still to ask, with the New Testament in our hands, what is the meaning of the strange fact that it never, outside this epistle, alludes to the Priesthood of our Lord, not even when the Seer in vision beheld our Forerunner in the heavens? If the fulfilment by Christ of those great functions, which that office foreshadowed, were never asserted elsewhere, the inference could not fail to be perplexing, and might be grave indeed. But it is not so. Every function which He performs as a Priest is equally ascribed to Him by other writers also : the difference is only that they do not point out the priestly character of it.

If our Priest pleads for us before God, St John says, We have an Advocate with the Father, and He is the Propitiation for our sins (1 John ii. 1, 2).

If the Priest is so identified with his clients that his acts are theirs, St Paul bases his baptismal doctrine upon the fact, that we are buried with Christ, and that in His resurrection we are raised ; and He insists that if there be no resurrection for us then Christ cannot have been raised (Rom. vi. 3, 4 ; 1 Cor. xv. 13).

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iii.

If the priest presents to God sacrificial and atoning blood, in the Gospel He is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world ; and we hear Him declaring that He came to give His life a ransom, and that His Body is broken and His blood shed for us ; while the Epistles tell us that we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, and that He suffered for us to bring us to God (John. i. 29 ; Matt. xx. 28 ; xxvi. 26, 27 ; 1 Peter i. 19 ; iii. 19). If His entrance into the Holiest entitles us to enter, and indeed represents us there, St Paul says that by Him we have the access unto the Father, and even that His enthronement in heaven is our enthronement there ; and St Peter declares that He suffered for us to bring us unto God . . . Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God. He Himself says, ' No man cometh unto the Father but by Me ' (Eph. ii. 6, 18 ; 1 Pet. iii. 18, 22 ; John xiv. 6).

This being so, we understand that when writing to Gentiles inspiration avoided a phrase which might conjure up the unholy associations of pagan rituals, and the doctrine was strong enough to stand alone. But the word is necessary when Jews have to be taught the superiority of the New System over the old, even in the very respects in which the old was loftiest and most spiritual. Thus the anomaly becomes an evidence.

2 . . . Jesus Who is faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses was faithful in all His (i.e. God's) house. ³ For this person hath been adjudged worthy of more glory than Moses, in as much as He hath more

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honour than the house who builded it. ⁴ For every Hebrews house hath been builded by some one, but He who ^{iii.} built all is God. ⁵ And Moses indeed was faithful in all His (i.e. God's) house as a servant for a testimony of things thereafter to be spoken, ⁶ but Christ as a son over His (i.e. God's) house.

By the angels the law was conveyed, but by ^{Greater} Moses it was promulgated and put into operation. ^{than Moses.} If we think of a dispensation as a house, built and fitted up (for the Greek word covers both) to be one harmony of plan and effect, then Moses was the chief servant in arranging the Old Covenant: there is no one else to be compared in this respect with Jesus in the New; and now the argument proceeds to consider their relative positions. It does not with this object make little of the former. The very word which calls him 'servant' is one of dignity, and comparatively seldom used. It does him the surprising honour of placing his fidelity beside that of Christ, quoting for this comparison the verse which says that God bestowed partial revelations upon others in dream or vision, but 'My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in My whole house,' as distinguished from service in some upper or lower room (Num. xii. 6, 7).

But while so much is granted, the difference outweighs the resemblance. Servants, even the highest, are but a part of the household apparatus: Moses is faithful within the house, but Christ as a Son over it. (It is to be noted that here, first in the Epistle, the title of our Lord, his official name, Christ, is men-

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Hebrews iii. tioned. For now the question is not of the humane sympathies of Jesus, but of the rank of the Messiah.)

Moreover it was said at the beginning, that by the Son God made the worlds. Therefore, even while we remember that the Father is the builder of all, the Son is above Moses as He who built the house is greater than the building wherein Moses is included, and also we. And yet again, everything in the Mosaic dispensation looked forward, hinted something unspoken, foreshadowed something better than it knew. Moses was faithful for a testimony of things thereafter to be spoken. And now God had spoken them in His Son.

Jesus Himself drew the same contrast (and it is hard to think that His words are not remembered here) when He told of the Lord of many servants, sending at last His Son, and saying, It may be that they will reverence Him when they see Him.

⁶ Whose house are we, if we hold fast the boldness and the (ground-of-) boasting of our hope firm unto the end. ⁷ Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear His voice, ⁸ harden not your hearts as in the provocation, and in the day of Temptation in the wilderness, ⁹ when your fathers tempted Me in trying, and saw My works, forty years, ¹⁰ wherefore I was wroth with this generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart, for they have not known My ways, ¹¹ Wherefore I sware in My wrath, If they shall enter into My rest (Ps. xcv. 7-11).

In this ordered system, this household of God, we (as truly as Moses, and more than they who reject

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the Son through a mistaken fidelity to the Law-giver) Hebrews
have our place, unless we are an element of disorder iii.
and discord imported into it. We shall be such, 'Who are
however, unless we are in harmony with the spirit 'His House?'
of the house of God—unless its interests and hopes
are ours. Let none think that he can live a christian
life without cherishing christian motives: we are
only His if His hope makes us glad, if this be
the matter of our glorying. We are not His, even
though our convictions go with Him, while our
aspirations and passions are secular.

The assertion is to be noted, that we are His
now, if we hold fast our christian joy unto the
end.

Controversies about the abstract doctrine of Final
Perseverance have perhaps burned out. But this
will scarcely be denied by serious christians of any
school, that there is a fidelity and hope now, the
future of which may be relied upon. In this very
Epistle, the most terrible of warnings against future
apostasy is followed by the words, 'But, beloved,
we are persuaded better things of you and things
that accompany salvation. . . . For God is not
unrighteous that He should forget your work and
labour.' Their past virtually guaranteed their future,
and so here, there is a present possibility of holding
fast unto the end.

Therefore we are bidden to hear His Voice, The Third
speaking again in Christ, as really as when Israel Warning.
disobeyed. And the exhortation which is quoted
from the Old Testament is plainly said to be the
Holy Ghost Himself warning us.

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The first caution was against drifting. But since the result of carelessness is hard insensibility (in religion as in all things), we are next warned against the hardening of our hearts. And the example of ancient Israel is set before us, divinely emancipated, guided, fed, yet finally excluded from the rest of God. Some have even thought that a special warning to the first Hebrew readers of the Epistle lurked in the mention of the forty years. For the date is approximately 70, that is to say, close upon forty years from the death and resurrection of the Lord.

How Israel
failed.

Very instructive are the steps of Israel's spiritual failure. They saw God's works forty years, but they did not know His ways, and so they naturally and always erred. The destruction of Pharaoh was a welcome rescue: it was not a holy vengeance upon sin, warning them also. Bread in the desert was good: it would have sufficed had they been grateful to the Giver; but for want of this they tempted God in the desert, and He gave them their desire but sent leanness also into their souls (Ps. cvi. 14, 15). Thus they hardened their hearts. But Isaiah declared, and Christ in the days of His flesh repeated, that men who begin by hardening their own hearts reach a stage at which God Himself judicially hardens them. And therefore in the thirteenth verse the sinner is passive, a victim and dupe, hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

The typical example is that of Pharaoh. God at the beginning threatened indeed to harden his heart,

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but the Revised Version for the first time enables Hebrews English readers to perceive that Pharaoh hardened himself through five plagues before God hardened him through another five. ^{iii.}

Upon the defection of His ancient people, God swore in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest. Once again, in the institution of our Priest, He is introduced as swearing, but this is for the confirmation of our faith in Him, and in the stability of His counsel (vi. 17, 18).

For hope and for warning He is the same immutable God.

¹² *Look to it, brethren, lest there shall be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the Living God,* ¹³ *but exhort yourselves every day while thus it is said: To-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;* ¹⁴ *for we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end, inasmuch as it is said:* ¹⁵ *To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.* ¹⁶ *But who, having heard, provoked? Nay, did not all who came out of Egypt by Moses?* ¹⁷ *And with whom was He provoked forty years? Was it not with them that sinned whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?* ¹⁸ *And to whom swore He that they should not enter into His rest but unto the disobedient?* ¹⁹ *And we see that they were unable to enter in through unbelief.*

Listlessness, disobedience, finally desertion, and unbelief at the root of all—such are the steps by

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iii.

The Pro-
gress of
Apostasy.

which souls are estranged from God. It is impossible to neglect and disobey Him, and yet retain a clear sense of His presence. Always Cain goes forth from His presence, and Judas from His paschal feast. For the conflict between creed and conduct is intolerable ; and if the conduct refuses to join the creed, the whole pressure of human nature is to draw the creed over to the conduct. It is not easy to violate law, except on the supposition that the eye of the living legislator is not upon us ; nor to wrong a loving friend, unless one hopes that the treachery will go unnoticed. The secret of the disobedience of ancient Israel is in the fact that they forgot God their Saviour ; and our danger also is in departing from the living God. Perhaps the expression is a reminiscence of an incident in the earthly life of Jesus. It was on a day when many had deserted, and walked no more with Him, that He said—perhaps to open a door of escape for Judas—‘ Do ye also desire to go away ? ’ And Simon answered, ‘ Lord, to whom should we go ? ’ To whom ? others had not thought of that : they had gone to their farm, and to their merchandise. But Peter and his comrades had found a living Leader, and could no longer exist without Him, Whose words were life, and Whom they felt to reveal to them the divine. And this is the heart of our religion, not the Spiritual Way nor the Noble Precepts of the East, but the living God, drawn close to us in Jesus, not to be forsaken, and never to forsake us.

‘ Exhort
yourselves.’

For the sake of heedfulness we are bidden to exhort ourselves every day, as long as that merciful

Greater than Moses

To-day is in our ears. Do not let us suppose that **Hebrews** the precept only means exhort each other. The most **iii.** intimate knowledge of our failures, defects, possibilities of attainment—it is our own. I only can say to myself with certainty, ‘Your failure was through neglect of prayer—of intercessory prayer—of Scripture—of Holy Communion: you must now set yourself to be more thankful, more circumspect, less diplomatic, or perhaps less vehement.’ I only can exhort myself every day. And in doing this the Holy Spirit of God will guide and elevate my consciousness.

One grave cause of hardening is the deceitfulness of sin. It presents itself as exceeding pleasant or advantageous or pardonable, but never as exceeding sinful: if we could see it thus, as sin, sin against God and Christ, against our neighbour and our own soul, it would no longer attract, it would be hateful.

Departure from God is the more ungrateful and shameless, because we are offered the most intimate nearness. As really as Christ became ‘partaker of flesh and blood’ (ii. 14) we are ‘partakers of Christ,’ if we hold the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end. Holding the beginning, He implies, we shall be led on to the consummation: the good seed in good soil shall become an abundant harvest. That we are ‘partakers of Christ’ is perhaps the nearest approach in this Epistle to a reference to the Eucharistic feast, of which the doctrine is quite clearly the doctrine also of this verse.

Even such privilege is not what secures the soul.

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Hebrews They who provoked were the same who came out of
iii. Egypt, and (in round terms) all who came. After so fair a promise, such a confident beginning of their hope, they strewed the desert with their corpses, because they sinned. And their disobedience sprang from unbelief. Did they not believe, then, that God was with them? Nay, but they could not believe that His guidance was surely better than their wishes, that His love was bestowing all real good, and that what it withheld was undesirable. Do we believe this? Is our life redeemed from the cravings which vex and fret, and virtually rebel against our Guide?

HEBREWS IV

1. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

2. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

3. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

4. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

5. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.

6. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

7. Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To-day, after so long a time; as it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

8. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

9. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

10. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

11. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

12. For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

13. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

14. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

15. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

16. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

IV

THE SABBATH OF GOD

Hebrews
iv.

¹ Let us fear therefore lest, a promise being left (still open) of entering into His rest, any of you should (even) seem to come short of it. ² For indeed we have had good tidings preached to us, even as they; but the word of the announcement availed them not, they not having been united by faith with the true hearers. Or, It not having been by faith incorporated into the personality of them who heard it.

Good Fear
and Bad.

There is a fear which has torment; and in giving way to this we do wrong to the loving care of God. It is the same which beside a precipice grows giddy with the apprehension that one cannot possibly be safe. There is another fear which may shudder at the thought of trifling on the brink, yet is serenely confident while standing where a prudent man may stand. The former is not and cannot be enjoined by this epistle, which will presently teach us to draw nigh with boldness to the throne of grace, and has already bidden us to hold fast our confidence. We may learn the difference by the Epistle to the Philippians, whom the Apostle teaches not to be overdependent on his help, but to obey still more in

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his absence, since it was not their teacher but God **Hebrews** Himself who worked in them both to will and do. **iv.**

No consideration could be more opposed to servile dread; but the thought of being false to such inspiration might well inspire a shuddering awe; and so Paul bade them, without his help, to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, because God Himself was working with them.

It was the genial humility of the writer who put himself upon their level, and said, 'Let us fear,' even though we presently discern that his misgiving was lest 'any of you' should fail. For it is failure in some degree even to 'seem to fail,' even to enter into that rest with less than an abundant entrance.

The primary readers of this Epistle were the first **The former Gospel.**

who received the Gospel; but those who fell in the wilderness had also a Gospel preached for the first time to them. Such is the assertion. But it was preached in vain. And there is a curious and in-

structive doubt about the phrase in which its failure is expressed. Is it said that the Gospel which **Why preached in vain.**

ought, since the Kingdom of God is leaven, to have interpenetrated and pervaded their whole being, failed because it was not by faith so mixed into their nature as to become a part of 'their very self'? Thus in the first parable the good seed is the word; but in the second it has passed into the very nature of men, and the good seed is the children of the Kingdom. Or is it meant that they were not by faith brought into the body of its true hearers, with Caleb and with Joshua? None can positively say. There is some preponderance of likelihood on one

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Hebrews side, and of documentary evidence on the other.
iv. But the message to us is identical ; and it is with the message that inspiration is concerned. To the docile heart, not to the literary taste, the Spirit of God is speaking. And He declares that the ancient Church failed through lack of faith, which is equally indispensable, whether it is regarded as identifying the word preached with the character of its hearer, or the man with the company of the saints, who indeed are the ' faithful.'

³ For we that believed are entering into this rest, as He hath said, ' As I sware in My wrath, if they shall enter into My rest,' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For He hath spoken somewhere of the seventh day thus, ' And God rested on the seventh day from all His works' ; ⁵ and in this place again, ' If they shall enter into My rest.' ⁶ Seeing therefore it remaineth that some should enter into it, and they to whom first the word came entered not in through disobedience, ⁷ again He defineth a certain day—' to-day'—saying in David after so long a time, ' To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

The
Hospitality
of God.

In the parable of the Supper, when the first invited refused the summons, messengers were sent through all the city, and presently out into the highways and hedges, that the house of God might be filled. ' For,' it was said, ' none of them that were bidden shall taste of my supper.' Therefore, the invitation takes so wide a range ; for it is implied though not stated that the hospitality of

The Sabbath of God

the Lord must not be defeated : He cannot consent **Hebrews**
to sit down to a lonely feast. **iv.**

Such is also the argument of these verses. The rest to which Israel was called was not—as will presently be demonstrated—merely their entrance into Palestine. It was the rest of God, and the sentence of their exclusion was, ‘They shall not enter into My rest.’ Wherefore this Epistle concludes without hesitation that the invitation has passed to others : ‘Some must enter in.’ It is really, in the last resort, an inference from the gracious character of God. **The Rest of God.**

As in the parable the oxen and fatlings were killed and all things ready, so here the divine rest is not prospective ; it has begun and they are bidden to share it. God rested on the seventh day from all His works which He created and made. This, he seems to say, renders their failure the more pitiful—they shall not enter, although the rest actually awaited them, although God’s works were finished from the foundation of the world.

This assertion, implying that the Sabbath of God **Jesus and the Sabbath.** has not yet ended, joins hand with a remarkable answer of Jesus when accused of Sabbath-breaking. ‘My Father,’ said He, ‘worketh hitherto’ through His Sabbath, ‘and I work’ through Mine. He who stayed His hand from creation stayed it not from providence and the administration of His universe. So Christ never in the days of His flesh wrought one creative marvel ; He multiplied existent material as nature does, and repaired what was injured, but this limit He never overstepped, nor forgot that

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Hebrews iv. His Father rested from all that He created and made.

It is strange enough that we should have needed Geology to tell us that the creative days were vast spaces of time, with such evidence from the Psalm and this Epistle, and the plain declaration of our Lord Himself that the seventh day of the series still lasts, all through the historic ages, and the rest of God invites us.¹

What is a Sabbath?

Neither in this nor any other world does rest mean inert passivity. The armies which are in heaven follow the Christ to war. The Sabbath of God is consistent with an unslumbering providence. And Christ healed upon earthly Sabbath days. The rest into which the people of God are called is the repose of balanced and harmonious energies, not that of the Buddha on the lotus-leaf.

‘Some must enter in’; for this is the patient but inevitable will of God. But the call is still repeated by David (‘after so long a time’), and with the urgency of a brief opportunity—‘to-day!’

¹ The writer of these comments is himself convinced that when Jesus said of our earthly Sabbath, that it was made for man, He did not mean for Jews only. He holds it to be significant that our Lord’s many and varied defences of His own treatment of the Sabbath were all based on the position of a devout Jew, not of one for whom the Sabbath was abolished. And he cannot think it a slight thing that the prophets, sometimes in the very act of waving mere ceremonialism aside, bear emphatic testimony to the Sabbath, which so many now regard as another ceremonial among the rest. (Contrast especially vers. 6 and 13 of Isa. lviii.) But he cannot pretend to think that this passage refers directly or indirectly to our weekly day of rest, or that this is even alluded to in the words, ‘There remaineth therefore a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God.’

The Sabbath of God

Now this call of David shows that the invitation **Hebrews** was not met when Joshua crossed the Jordan into **iv.** Palestine.

⁸ For, if Joshua gave them rest, then would He not after these things have spoken of another day.

⁹ There remaineth therefore a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God. ¹⁰ For He that entered into His rest, Himself also ceased from His work as God did from His own.

Although the people failed in the time of Moses, **Greater** did they not under Joshua attain their rest? **than Joshua.** The Epistle answers that if it were so, He would not afterward have spoken of another day. And indeed the history is too full of wars, of tribal discords, of national sins and punishments, to allow of our bestowing on any period up to that of David, the beautiful name of rest.

Nevertheless, one might object, the entrance into **Nor was** Palestine was that which Israel under Moses forfeited. **Canaan** And in a sense this is true. But in contenting them- **Rest.** selves to regard Canaan as the ideal of their heritage, Canaan itself was spoiled for them. And so is every earthly good spoiled for those who look no further, and refuse to be saved by hope, by aspiration. Abraham's condemnation of the rich man in the parable is not 'Thou in thy life-time receivedst good things,' but 'thou receivedst thy good things.' We shall read hereafter of Abraham himself that in the place which was promised to him for an inheritance he dwelt in tents, a stranger in the land of Promise, because his hope had gone forward to the city which hath the

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Hebrews foundations. Even so the real and ideal rest, the
iv. true fulfilment of the promise, awaits us, the eternal Sabbath-keeping of the people of God, the repose of the land whose last enemy is destroyed, of the pilgrims who have reached their home, where His kindness shall not depart from them, nor the covenant of His peace be removed.

Jesus rests. The tenth verse is one of peculiar difficulty. But the grammar and structure of it are best met by an explanation which, however surprising at first sight, gains in beauty the more it is considered. That rest which is set before us, our Forerunner has already entered. He, who once said, I must work while it is called To-day, on entering into His rest ceased from His works as God did from His own. He said, It is finished. The Jesus whom we call Joshua gave Israel no deep and satisfying rest; but our Jesus, the Son of God, has entered into rest on our behalf, and by Him we too may enter. He it is whom the verse represents, with a marked and isolating emphasis, as having 'Himself entered into rest.' Thus the verse does not stand alone and unconnected, but prepares the reader to return, after having seen the supremacy over Moses and Joshua, to the consideration of His representative character, His high priesthood, already mentioned at the end of Chap. II. and the beginning of Chap. III.

Before resuming this, the main theme of the Epistle, there is another personal application of what has already been made good. It is usual in our time to contrast dogmatic and practical teaching;

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but an antithesis is often misleading, and there is **Hebrews** no antithesis more misleading than this. For our **iv.** practice depends upon our theories: our life on our beliefs. All that our Epistle establishes of Christian dogma goes straight to warn us against carelessness of life, to incite us to fresh energy and zeal.

¹¹ Let us be zealous therefore to enter into that rest, lest any fall after the same example of disobedience.

¹² For living is the word of God and energetic and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and of spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the feelings and reasonings of the heart. ¹³ Neither is any creature hidden in His sight, but all things are naked and open to His eyes with Whom we have to do.

The prize is for those who strive, not for those who are at ease in Zion, and assuredly not for all except a few reckless or bitter opponents. Christ Himself said, He that gathereth not with Me scattereth. We must be zealous, and not for ourselves only, but so that all strive together lest any fall. And we are reminded of the example of Israel. We, to whom the loss of all—of eternal repose and bliss—is well nigh unimaginable, who can no more think it of ourselves than the young can realise that they shall die, we are bidden to remember the fall of others for our warning: it is not an unprecedented thing: they fell through disobedience, which again came through unbelief.

Let us be zealous—for we have to do with **Much is** vehement forces: we are born into no slumbrous world, **at stake.**

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Hebrews iv. Vital and energetic is the Word of God,¹ which calls to us 'To-day, if ye will hear My Voice.' Keen it is to sever between those who hearken and those who stop their ears: it searches: it pierces deep.

Soul is cut asunder and spirit: and the recesses of that physical system by which soul and spirit work. It is the only anatomist of the soul. After the autopsy of the third Napoleon, one wrote "the brain was absolutely healthy." What? no record there of ruined empire.' No scalpel of science can cut so deep; but the Word of God can and does dissect out both sides of our spiritual nature; alike the affections and the reasonings, which are so often, so ruinously diverse and disproportionate. The Word of God searches all: not we alone, but all creation, lies naked, and helpless as a gladiator when his throat is bent back to feel the blade,² before the eyes of Him with Whom is (literally) our word-of-reckoning. Alas how thin and shallow is our reply to that all-penetrating word. But this same Epistle again uses the same expression to tell us that they who watch for our souls may hope to render their word-of-reckoning with joy (xiii. 17).

¹⁴ *Having then a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession; ¹⁵ for we have not an High*

¹ 'The Logos,' but certainly not here the Incarnate Word of St John; if only because the expression used in that high sense would not, in the next verse, be used also of 'our word-of-reckoning.'

² 'Naked and open.' I do not think any expositor will pretend to give with confidence the meaning of the second of these words—or rather the metaphor by which the meaning is conveyed.

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Priest unable to feel with our infirmities, but was tempted in all points like unto us, without sin. Hebrews iv.

¹⁶ *Let us come then with boldness to the throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

Chastened by such solemn thoughts, we nevertheless may not despond. For our High Priest, Whose greatness has been thus demonstrated, and Who is now called by His human name of Jesus, with the majestic addition 'the Son of God,' has for us traversed all the heavens as if they were one chamber of the temple, even to the throne of God. We are to confess Him, and in time of persecution to hold our confession fast. For He will pity and assist us. He not only knows and intellectually discerns our weaknesses, as some high order of spiritual beings may be supposed to comprehend them; but He can be touched with the feeling of them, for without sin He has known the crafts and assaults of temptation. With Him we are bidden to experience by faith our unity. The people stood afar off while the Aaronic priest passed through the veil to the mercy-seat; and the Christian goal is the pattern of which that was the type; and it is called by a loftier name with a like meaning, the Throne of Grace; but there we are ourselves as priests to enter, ourselves to receive mercy for past transgressions, and grace to help us in time of need and in proportion to it.

But our help
suffices.

HEBREWS V

1. For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins :

2. Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way : for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

3. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

4. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

5. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an High Priest ; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee.

6. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec.

7. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared :

8. Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered :

9. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him :

10. Called of God an High Priest after the order of Melchisedec.

11. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

12. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God ; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

13. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness ; for he is a babe.

14. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

V

THE HIGH PRIEST

¹ *For every High-Priest, being taken from among Hebrews men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to v. God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; ²who can feel moderately toward the ignorant and erring, for that himself also is encompassed with infirmity, ³and by reason thereof is bound, as for the people so also for himself to offer for sins. ⁴And no man taketh the honour unto himself, but being called of God, as was Aaron.*

All preliminary questions have now been cleared away, and we come to examine in detail the resemblances and differences between the Aaronic and the Messianic Priesthood. It is the crowning demonstration, for Hebrew Christians, of their Master's claim upon their loyalty. Christ
our Priest.

In the first place every High-Priest is chosen from among men, or else, though he might intercede for them, he could not represent them. And he has to offer on their behalf both gifts and sacrifices for sin. 'Gifts' are not necessarily bloodless: neither do 'Sacrifices' absolutely imply the surrender of life. Many examples of the reverse can be produced from the Greek Old Testament, as when it is said, Offerings
for Sin.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews v. 'Ye shall bring gifts of the cattle and of the oxen and of the sheep,' and when 'Cain brought a sacrifice of the fruits of the ground' (Lev. i. 2, 3; Gen. iv. 3, 5). But when as here the words are employed together, this is the simplest and most obvious distinction between the two.

It is for sin that he offers both gifts and sacrifices; and if the gifts were inanimate this might seem to contradict the great principle that without shedding of blood there is no remission.

But an exception to this rule existed in the case of the poor man, 'whose means suffice not': the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour was then accepted 'as a sin-offering': the priest burned this upon the altar; and he was forgiven (Lev. v. 11-13). In making this exception, however, the rule is clearly kept in view; but the language of the text is justified. It is really based, however, upon a principle far deeper, upon a profound conviction that our best gifts need the intercession of our priest to sanctify them. This spoke in the Hebrew ritual in the fact that no meal-offering is ever prescribed, or known to have been allowed, except in company with burnt-offerings or peace-offerings; and the feasts of Harvest and Pentecost were accompanied by the offering of slain victims.

In our modern language the same conviction speaks. It says:—

Forgive what seems my sin in me,
What seems my worth since I began;
For merit lives from man to man,
And not from man, O Lord, to Thee.

The High Priest

All offerings have indeed to do with sin. The ideal Hebrews priest must be able to feel moderately toward the ignorant and erring. The word employed is a beautiful and helpful one. Passion lies on one side of it: scorn and resentment and revenge. At the other extreme is apathy, the deadening of emotion altogether, 'not to admire or desire,' the cold ideal of the Stoic. Between these two is emotion rightly governed and chastened, moderation in appetite and impulse, and among other impulses in revenge. David's cry, 'The man that hath done this thing shall surely die, and shall restore fourfold,' is passion; it is excessive: it is the utterance of a temper least of all befitting to a priest. Nathan's words, 'The Lord hath taken away thy sin, thou shalt not die,' is the moderation of the text, conscious of the sin, conscious also that it is not quite unpardonable.

It has to do not only with actions (or else the rendering 'can bear gently with' (R.V.) would meet the case), but still more with the heart itself, whose plague lies far too deep for any catalogue of overt sins to state.

Every priest should feel thus toward 'the ignorant and erring.' The meaning is not only that he should regard sin in the milder aspect which these words express: it is that sins of ignorance and error alone were dealt with in the daily sacrifices: others, if treated at all, were only dealt with in the great annual Atonement (Numbers xv. 24, 31). Therefore the priest, who judged whether an offering might be made, should be gentle, not ruthless to repel.

v.
A Priest
should be
tender.

Ignorant
and Erring.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews v. Our Priest, when with us, said to the penitent, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more' (John viii. 11).

So far, it is a parallel that had been drawn between those ancient priests and ours, but here the lines diverge. They learned compassion by their own besetments, as Christ said to such, Let him that is without sin among you be merciless. He also knew temptation, but not that weakness in its presence which is the prelude to surrender, and which is here meant by infirmity,—for we read that by reason of this, those priests offered for sin, as for others, so also for themselves.

Thus on the great day of Atonement, on which the ancient ritual culminated, the high-priest slew a bullock and presented its blood for his own sins, before he was competent to offer the goat for the congregation. But we shall presently find the sinlessness of our Priest triumphantly attested by the words, 'This He did once,' and by the fact that His one offering was Himself.

But Christ
once only.

So pure He was. The high-priest, it was said already, was appointed for men. And now this is repeated, more pointedly: no man taketh this honour unto himself, except when he is called of God, as was Aaron.

The Epistle throughout is signally tender in its treatment of the Jewish institutions, so as not to offend Hebrews; but they who first read this verse could not have failed to remember the intrigues with Rome, the crimes, the shames by which the priesthood had long been won, sometimes by men

The High Priest

of a lineage wholly unqualified. It was not thus Hebrews in the good days: Aaron (and by consequence ^{v.} his line) was really called by God. And so was Christ, alike as to greatness and as to priestly office. And instead of usurping the honour for Himself, it came to Him in ways of dread, and agony, and tears.

⁵ So also the Christ glorified not Himself to be made an High-priest, but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, I have to-day begotten Thee; ⁶ and also in another place He saith, Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. ⁷ Who in the days of His flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications unto Him that was able to save Him from (out of) death, with strong crying and tears, and having been heard for His reverential-awe, ⁸ though He was Son, yet learned He obedience by things He suffered, ⁹ and being made perfect became, to all that obey Him, the cause of eternal salvation, ¹⁰ hailed of God as High-priest after the order of Melchizedek.

In only two places in the Old Testament is the great coming Priest announced, as only here in the New Testament is He exhibited. In all three 'the ^{A Royal Priest.} counsel of peace is between' this office and another, for stress is laid upon His royalty. 'Sit Thou at My right hand.' 'Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek,' who bore the style and rank of king (Ps. cx. 1, 4). Again 'He shall be a Priest upon His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both' (Zech. vi. 13). The Epistle reminds us

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Hebrews v. that Melchizedek was King of Salem, and his very name is King of righteousness.

Therefore it is that before citing His appointment as priest, the author first establishes His rank, Thou art My Son. To others I say, To-day, if ye will hear My voice : to Thee I say, To-day I, I have begotten Thee. With this prelude we are given the explicit proof of His appointment, enforced in detail in the 7th chapter : 'Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'

'The Days of His Flesh.' We are now shown how far from the path of selfish ambition was Christ's way to His Priesthood. 'In the days of His flesh . . . though Son by rank . . . He learned obedience.' In heaven He still wears our flesh, but it is glorified and transformed, a spiritual Body ; on earth it was the medium of His temptations. The days of His flesh were such as when He fasted in the desert, and was weary by the well ; when He had not where to lay His head ; when He would have satisfied His hunger with unripe figs ; when the sweat of His anguish was as great drops of blood, and He needed to be strengthened by an angel ; when He said, 'I thirst' ; when He bowed His head and died.

'Crying and Tears.' But the Epistle at this stage is thinking less of atoning anguish than of the prayer which it inspired. Nowhere else do we read so distinctly of the passion of His entreaty, the strong crying and tears. But it is noteworthy that He is elsewhere shown to us as capable of such emotion. His weeping by the grave of Lazarus was of gentle silent tears, naturally, since He was about to raise the lost one ; but over

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the doomed city from which hope was gone, His Hebrews weeping was a loud lamentation. The assertion is ^{v.} not that in such sorrow He learned to obey, as if He Himself needed discipline, but that He learned obedience, what it is, how heavily it presses upon flesh and blood. Thus pleading for Himself, He became the perfect Intercessor for us all. Thus crying to Him who was able to save Him, He Himself became the author of eternal salvation for all that obey Him.

As yet, no allusion is made to the atoning efficacy of His death. It follows in due course, when we are reminded that He also must of necessity have somewhat to offer. But in the meantime, it is a grave question whether we derive the help and comfort which we might, from this prior view of the suffering of our Lord. For its sake, the other is for awhile held back. Let us think of Him as an absolutely prevalent Priest, Who cannot plead in vain, Who is enthroned beside the Eternal Father. Then let us think that He has undertaken our cause in heaven as truly as He has borne our sins upon the cross. But let us go on to think of His perfect sensibilities, that He is the same to-day and forever as yesterday, ^{Still the same.} the same in heaven as when He was not ashamed to put on record for our learning His strong crying and tears. These, these made Him perfect in His priesthood, interceding for us who sometimes also cannot suppress our sobs. As truly as He felt for Himself, He feels for His members also.

And His prayer was to be saved from death, or ^{From Death.} literally out of death ; in which sense only the letter

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Hebrews v. of His entreaty was fulfilled. In either view, it was for a temporal deliverance that He pleaded. And how say some among us that we may not ask for any but spiritual gifts, or again, that we pray, not to influence the will of God toward us, but to achieve the surrender of our wills to Him? Christ surrendered His own will, but this did not prevent Him from earnestly representing it to His Father. In truth this notion is self-condemned. For, if prayer modifies our relation toward God, it must therefore, and in the same degree, modify His relation toward us. Exactly so far as it makes us other than we were, it must induce the Searcher of Hearts to regard us otherwise than He did.

God and Prayer.

Either God is not immanent in His world, does not hourly govern it, is not so near that in Him we live and move and exist, or else His treatment of us varies with our attitude toward Him, and is therefore influenced especially by our prayers, in which we consciously and humbly approach Him. They modify His treatment of us, not as they are importunate, but as they are filial. And this passage distinctly teaches such a view of prayer (although the Authorised Version deprives us of the lesson) by saying of Christ Himself that He 'was heard for His reverential-awe.' The Greek word is an expressive and beautiful one. It suggests the manner in which one holds a frail and precious thing, a vase, a piece of sculpture, which is not to be handled lightly. Thus Abraham prayed, 'O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet this once.' And thus our Lord Himself, 'Son though He was,' said, 'Nevertheless, not My

**Christ's
'Reverence.'**

The High Priest

will but Thine be done.' Prayer is a very solemn Hebrews thing. All presumption, dictation, levity, egoism, ^{v.} are far removed from the prayers which God will answer for their reverential awe : far removed also from those which a High-priest such as ours can be supposed to present for us to God.

Thus perfected, and as a soldier on whom a new title is conferred, or a prince whose succession is made good, He is said to have been publicly saluted, proclaimed, hailed of God, High-priest after the order of Melchizedek.

¹¹ *Concerning Whom we have much to say, and hard to express clearly, since ye are become dull of hearing ;*
¹² *for ye, who ought to be teachers by reason of the time, again have need that one should teach you what be the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God ; and are come to have need of milk and not of solid food.* ¹³ *For everyone who partaketh of milk is inexperienced in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.* ¹⁴ *But solid food is for them that are mature, who by use have their senses exercised for the discrimination of good and evil.*

Concerning Melchizedek as a type the writer has much to say—and he presently says it. Already his language implies that it must be said, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. But their shortcoming has made his task difficult. They have become dull of hearing ; they have need that one should teach them over again. Dulness of Hearing.

They have become such as have need of milk. Now this is the working, in the intellectual and

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews v. spiritual sphere, of the great law of growth and decline, which governs all life everywhere. It must advance or fall back. Neglected faculty dies away from the individual as disused organs from the species. We constantly hear men speak, and truly speak, of tastes and capabilities which they enjoyed when young ; but which, from want of time or industry to cultivate them, have entirely disappeared. So it is with the soul. From him who will not walk with God, God hides His face. From him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away—not at the last judgment only. For it is written of them who forgot how they had received and heard, that even what remains is ready to die (Rev: iii. 2, 3).

Need of
Milk.

At the beginning it was no disgrace to require elementary teaching : we all were infants once. But again to become such as have need of milk—this is to sink into second childhood ; this is deplorable indeed. Yet (he seems to say) it may be that they require such diet. As with a diseased frame, so with the sickly soul of the backslider, milk may for a time be needed. But this means forfeiture of development, loss of energy, relaxation and enfeeblement. It is worth asking, then, how many among modern christians are satisfied to remain ever as they began, content with their first experiences and earliest views of truth, like one who boasts that he has learned to read, without even a suspicion of the pathos, the sublimity and the charm to which his attainment, rightly used, could lead him.

There is strong meat for the mature. It is our privilege to grow in grace and in the knowledge of

The High Priest

our Lord and Saviour. And here a phrase is Hebrews employed which is as old as the history of man. ^{v.}
Our first parents fell through impatient eagerness 'To discern
to know good and evil. They should have known good and evil.'
it in due time if they had been obedient: by practice
their senses should have been exercised to discriminate good and evil. And there is a wonderful difference between the scholars of these two schools of knowledge. The bad man knows badness as it were by an unholy sixth sense, a free-masonry of evil. He shrinks away from goodness, conscious of exposure in its gaze, hiding as of old among the trees of the garden. The good man knows the good as by an instinct, and his soul closes against the bad, like some flowers when the sun is overcast.

HEBREWS VI

1. Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection ; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

2. Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

3. And this will we do, if God permit.

4. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

5. And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

6. If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance ; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

7. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God :

8. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing ; whose end is to be burned.

9. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

10. For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

11. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end :

12. That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

13. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself.

14. Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.

15. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

16. For men verily swear by the greater : and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

17. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath :

18. That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us :

19. Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the vail ;

20. Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

VI

WARNING AND CHEER

¹ *Wherefore, leaving the word of the beginning of* Hebrews *the Christ, let us be carried forward to perfection,* vi. *not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God,* ² [of] *doctrine of baptisms, and laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment.*

It is notable that in the foundation which he will not lay again, in the word of the beginning of the Christ, the name of Christ is not even mentioned. But it underlies all, and each article, well understood, leads the soul to Him. His love and His holiness move us to repent: His Incarnation reveals to us a God in Whom we may put faith: baptism is His institution, and we are baptised into His death; and He gives the strength and spirit for office which is expressed by the laying on of hands: He is the first fruit of the Resurrection, and assures us that we too shall rise; and He is the eternal Judge.

The "dead works" from which we must repent are not only transgressions of explicit law, but all actions which no living Spirit animates; not only the riot of the prodigal, but also the chilly obedience of his brother, complaining that he never received a kid, when all that his father had was his. Death is not necessarily

Six
Foundations.

Repentance
from what?

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews vi. and at once corruption ; but the symbolism of Moses declared it to be defiling always. Therefore, in the only place where this phrase recurs we read of the cleansing of the conscience from dead works (Heb. ix. 14). Why indeed should we expect God to accept that unloving and formal service which we should refuse from our own child, even if we received it from a hireling ?

Faith. With repentance faith is joined, which releases the penitent from the burden of his sins. It is mentioned here in passing ; we shall find an elaborate study of it further on.

Baptism. Next to these spiritual experiences come two acts, performed upon the individual by the Church : baptism and the imposition of hands. But it is not the act, in either case, which is here declared to be a primary and elemental thing : it is the meaning and message of the act, 'the doctrine of baptisms and of imposition of hands.' So in St Peter the baptism which 'saves us' is not the mere operation, as the flesh is cleansed, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet. iii. 21).

The Laying on of Hands. After baptism came, when this Epistle was written, the imposition of apostolic hands (Acts viii. 17 ; xix. 6), and the same sign expressed sometimes the gift of healing, sometimes a commission to act for God. It well represents the conveyance of spiritual energy, that unction from above which must co-operate with faculty and devotion within, if these are indeed to be effective in the work of God.

The Future. Lastly, there is the doctrine of our future, of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment.

Warning and Cheer

Thus we find, at the very foundation of christian Hebrews teaching, the personal approach of the sinner to his ^{vi.} God; his place in the Church with its appointed means of grace; and the sobering consciousness of responsibility, another life than this, the reckoning of the Master with His servants. All this they should know well: it was elementary: other knowledge lay beyond, to which the writer was determined to press forward. But the expression of his purpose is remarkable: he says, 'Let us be borne onward' to the completeness of our Christian course. Is it credible that he wrote this word 'let us be borne forward' without reference to his former mention of those who drifted away at the mercy of winds and currents? There is an art of navigation which uses these to reach its haven. Moreover there are benign spiritual forces, 'powers of the world to come,' to which we may, if we will, surrender ourselves, to waft us gently forward. Let us be borne on unto perfection.

³ *And this will we do if God permit.* ⁴ *For them who have been once for all enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the coming age, and have fallen away, ⁶ them it is impossible again to renew unto repentance [in the act of] crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and putting Him to open shame. ⁷ For land which has drunk in the rain coming upon it oftentimes, and beareth herbs meet for them for whom it is tilled, receiveth blessing from God, ⁸ but bearing thorns and thistles it is worthless and nigh to cursing, whose end is to be burned.*

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
vi.

The Fourth
Warning.

It will be convenient to treat this solemn and indeed awful admonition first in a broad and general way, looking at the passage as a whole. Afterward it will be possible to gather up any words or phrases to which a special interest attaches, which may have escaped the meshes of the general argument.

The Unpar-
donable Sin.

It is a passage that has overshadowed and disquieted many a timid and overscrupulous believer, to whom, least of all, its warnings really address themselves. No one can read it and not call to mind our Lord's own words about the sin without forgiveness, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. It has been much discussed whether or not the two passages treat of the same sin. On one side it is argued that they are different, because the warning of Christ was spoken to sinners outside His fold, while this passage treats of the falling away of Christians. But if He warned even them that were without that to blaspheme against the light and knowledge they possessed might be unpardonable, much more might the same deadly offence—deadly because it was against light and knowledge—be perpetrated by deserters who insulted their faith and their Redeemer. In fact there is clear evidence that this is so. The Lord declared explicitly that all manner of sins should be forgiven to the sons of men, and blasphemies where-with soever they should blaspheme. This was true even of blasphemy against the Son of Man, unless (by implication or directly) it ran up into a greater crime, and blasphemed against the Holy Ghost. Thus there is only one unpardonable sin. But this sin is unpardonable; therefore it is identical with

Warning and Cheer

that: perhaps a different phase, but virulent with Hebrews vi. the same poison.

In each case the sin is desperate, not because it is, in strictness of speech, unpardonable, but because it is incorrigible. In the Gospel, 'he hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin': the continuance of the crime continues also the reprobation. In this epistle, the impossibility is to renew him again unto repentance. But this leaves unshaken and unqualified the assurance of pardon to all penitent souls. No penitent need ever fear that he has come under this sentence, for if he had, he would never again know the meaning of repentance.

Again, the menace of the text is not against all who fall, nor even all who deny Christ. Peter fell; Peter denied Christ. But his heart was not in his denial, and the resurrection morning found him in company with John: his failure was the weakness of the flesh, not the deliberate apostasy of the will. Therefore it was in no sense final or decisive. But they whom the text contemplates have so fallen away as to cut themselves off from all holy influences: they have renounced the one sacrifice for sin; and there remains no other. This open and blasphemous apostasy has two sides to it: one affecting their own consciousness, and one their environment. For themselves, they have inflicted deliberate anguish upon Christ in His majesty, crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh. As regards others, they have put Him to open shame.

Now the Scripture bears strong testimony to the decisive influence of crucial moments. 'With the

Hebrews vi.

Incorrigible.

Not said
of all
Apostates.

Crucial
Moments.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
vi.

mouth confession is made unto salvation,' since a word bravely spoken for the Lord releases one thereafter from numberless cowardly evasions and false shames: it ranges him; thenceforward he will not flinch. 'From henceforth let no man trouble me,' said Paul: 'my choice is decisively made: my scars are like the brand on cattle to declare that I belong to Christ: I bear about on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

But if a clear and strong decision be so powerful for good, it must equally be so for evil. To have recognised the work of the Holy Ghost, and blasphemed Him by ascribing it to Beelzebub, this is to murder the Christ within, by desertion and denial among spectators to put Him to an open shame; and to do this with deliberate purpose must indeed be a crisis in the life. The powers of good are known and exhausted, and there are no others to whom to appeal. 'Let us go on'—'for these we can do no more.' Alas, the life they have chosen continues: while we would renew them again, they are still crucifying Christ, still putting Him to shame.

Attainment
is not
Security.

By this time we see clearly why the spiritual attainments of these men are detailed. Upon these they have turned their back. They were, once for all, illuminated: whatever happened, they could never cease to know. They had taken share in the heavenly gift—which does not mean the joy of pardon, nor the Eucharist, nor any definite experience vaguely hinted, but broadly and generally the grace of God, and what is called elsewhere 'His unspeakable gift' (2 Cor. ix. 15). The Holy Spirit had

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thrilled and softened them. They had not only **Hebrews** heard with their ears, but had tasted how sweet is the **vi.** benign word of God, and known the powers of the coming dispensation. And to all this privilege and blessing they had been deliberately false. But indeed we now begin to discern the secret of their apostasy. The whole experience thus detailed is a catalogue of gifts received: there is not a hint of grateful service rendered in return. They are not such as have laboured and suffered for their Lord. Nor is love among their gifts.

The illustration which follows brings out this point beyond dispute. A piece of land drinks in the rain which falls upon it. And what then? All depends upon the recompense it offers. If it be fruitful it receives blessing from God, Who at the beginning blessed all that He had made. But if it, the same land, in return for the same rain from heaven, bear thorns and thistles, it is reckoned worthless: it is nigh unto the primal curse which said, 'Cursed is the ground for thy sake, thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth.' And it is assumed that in the heart of man, as in the field, there is no choice but to produce one or other, crops or thorns.

There are a few phrases to be noted.

'If God permit' (ver. 3) is said, because there are some for whom any progress is impossible.

Some Note-worthy Phrases.

The 'good word of God' (ver. 5) is 'goodly, beautiful'; and the order of words suggests the paraphrase, 'have tasted the word of God that it is beautiful.'

'To renew them again' (ver. 6) is to be taken

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews vi. strictly : the imparting of spiritual life at first is ' the renewing of our minds ' : it is regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Rom. xii. 2 ; Titus iii. 5). Consequently the restoration of these apostates would be a renewing over again.

' Nigh unto cursing ' is a phrase which recoils from saying the utmost of a stern and dreadful doom. But there is in it this further aptness, that one who sees the ground thus resembling what was described long ago in the words, ' cursed is the ground . . . thorns and thistles shall it bring forth,' connects the two and thinks with sombre bodings, ' This is such as that and may expect as stern a fate.'

⁹ But concerning you brethren we are persuaded the things which are better and accompany salvation, even though we speak thus. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust, that He should forget your work and the love which ye have shown unto His Name, who have ministered unto the saints and minister.' ¹¹ But we desire that each of you should show the same zeal for the full assurance of the hope unto the end ; ¹² so that ye be not slothful, but imitators of them who through faith and long suffering inherit the promises.

A Better
Hope.

At this point the writer softens and relents. He contemplates good and evil in the aggregate, and speaks not vaguely of ' better things ' but definitely of ' the better things and those which accompany salvation,' those things in which souls are as close to salvation as others are nigh unto burning. And he tells his readers—whom here only, as in a sudden rush of emotion, he calls by the name so frequent in

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St Paul, 'Beloved'—that concerning them he is **Hebrews** persuaded of the better things, even though, as the **vi.** original implies, he has only acquired this persuasion after misgiving and reflection. He has attained to it.

For, he says, God is not unjust to forget their **Work, not Works.** work, and the love within which prompted the visible effort. The very phraseology is suggestive. Their works were many : they had ministered to the saints, and they continued to do so ; but all this is treated as one, 'your work.' This is a peculiarity of all the New Testament. When Jesus was asked 'What shall we do that we may work the' various 'works of God?' He answered, 'This is the' one 'work of God that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent' (John vi. 28, 29). The entire life is conceived as fused into one organic coherent whole—one warfare of many struggles, one pilgrimage of many halting-places—when it is inspired by one master passion. Earthly appetites, at strife among themselves, drag us this way and that : The Spirit of God brings harmony and peace. And therefore St Paul wrote, 'the works of the flesh are . . . the fruit of the Spirit is' (Gal. v. 19).

Now this, he says, God is not unjust that He should **God not Unjust.** forget. But what does this mean? Can any work or grace entitle the ripest saint to say I have earned my salvation : God would be unjust if He withheld it now? Is it only a pretty sentiment, having done all, to say, 'We are unprofitable servants' . . . 'our righteousness extendeth not to Thee,' 'Merit lives from man to man, but not from man, O Lord, to

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews Thee? Nay, all this is true. And yet God has
vi. pledged Himself. Pardon is clearly gratuitous, yet
'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.'
And as surely as it is in His Covenant to pardon
the penitent, so it is to keep them in perfect peace
whose minds are stayed on Him. The justice or
injustice springs not from human merit, but from the
condescension of the divine assurance. He saw
their work. Their love for His name was manifested
in their ministrations to men upon whom His name
was called; and if not a sparrow, of which five are
sold for two farthings, is forgotten before God—how
then should He forget these?

But he earnestly desired that the same zeal which
thus worked in their charities, should exhibit itself
in their spiritual advancement 'towards the full-
assurance of the hope unto the end.' This is the
hope, set before them, of which we presently read
that they have fled for refuge to lay hold on it, that
it is an anchor of the soul, and that by it we enter
where our High Priest has gone (vi. 18-20). No
wonder that he desires them to be earnest in the
strengthening of so great a grace. By this means
they should not be slothful. It is the same word
which had lately declared that they were actually
'become dull' (sluggish) of hearing (ver. 11), and it
might well be feared that the vice which had effected
a lodgment in their intellects should infect their
whole life and become absolute. To avoid this they
should become 'imitators of them who through faith
and patience are inheriting the promise.' This
verse is an anticipation of the great Eleventh

Warning and Cheer

Chapter with its roll-call of the mighty dead; and Hebrews it can scarcely be undesigned that here we read 'they ^{vi.} are inheriting the promises,' but there they 'received not the promise.' But the explanation is simple. Much they have received and are in process of receiving still. The crowning gift of all is yet before them—and us. They without us are not made perfect.

It is worthy of notice that in three consecutive ^{Faith, Hope, Love.} verses the three cardinal virtues are mentioned, and the same occurs again in the Tenth Chapter. Here we read 'the love which ye have shown . . . the full-assurance of the hope . . . them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' There it is 'the full-assurance of faith . . . the profession of the hope . . . the provoking unto love' (x. 22-24).

We are bidden to be 'imitators' of the saints. It is the same word by which St Paul beseeches men to be imitators of him, and again says, 'Be ye imitators of me as I also am of Christ,' and again exhorts us to be imitators of God as dear children. In every place where it occurs it has been rendered 'followers'; and in every place we lose something very real unless we understand that we are exhorted to follow an example, to be copyists (1 Cor iv. 16, xi. 1; Eph. v. 1).

All this is attainable by the lowliest: the writer ^{'Every One.'} desires it for 'every one' of them. Perhaps he desires it for another reason besides love for even the lowliest. For no other epistle is more conscious of the danger of infection, the possibility of one root of bitterness defiling many, the need to look dili-

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews vi. gently whether there be any such. Therefore he desires that they may all advance together, 'every one of you.'

¹³ For when God had made promise to Abraham, since He could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴ saying, 'Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee' (Gen. xxii. 16). ¹⁵ And so, having faithfully endured, he received the promise. ¹⁶ For men verily swear by the better (cf. i. 4), and an end of all contradiction is an oath for confirmation. ¹⁷ Wherein (=this being so) God, willing to exhibit more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the immutability of His purpose, intervened with an oath, ¹⁸ that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong encouragement who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

The Oath of God.

God had given His promise to Abraham, and had reiterated it (Gen. xii. 3, 7 ; xiii. 14 ; xv. 5 ; xvii. 5). But after the sacrifice of Isaac, when the triumphant faith of the patriarch had overcome all that makes such promises to be conditional, he was given this further assurance, the first recorded oath of God. Shall we say that the reaction after a great victory needed to be provided for? Or that more was given to him because he had so well improved promise after promise, vouchsafed at every previous crisis of his soul?

This is man's way: an oath is man's last resort against contradiction. And therefore God condescends to the same, and swears the greatest of all oaths, by

Warning and Cheer

Himself. Such was the assurance of Abraham; Hebrews such may be ours says the chapter which began with ^{vi.} dark misgivings and forebodings. For this oath was not given to Abraham alone, but to all 'the heirs of the promise.' 'We that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.' He sware, 'that we might have strong encouragement who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.' To doubt is to insult God, Who cannot lie, and Who has not only promised but sworn to us. Given to Us.

Let us observe in passing that the lawfulness of an oath, not light nor wanton but given upon an adequate occasion, is clearly implied by this argument, even though, in an ideal society, none would swear, for none would ask more than 'yea, yea,' and nay, nay. Whatsoever is more than these, even though it be not always evil, always 'cometh of evil,' of the degrading necessity to reinforce a statement with some stronger confirmation.

Alas that the weakness of our faith should make such a requirement from God. As if matters were in the balance between His word and our faithlessness, He is said to have 'intervened' with an oath, and this verb does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. But in proportion as the requirement is unreasonable, in the same proportion our sense of the condescending love which grants it should expand and deepen. Our encouragement is strong. Our hope is set before us full in view, and we have fled for refuge to grasp and hold it.

¹⁹ *Which (hope) as an anchor of the soul we have, sure and steadfast, and entering into that within the*

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Hebrews vi. *veil, ²⁰ whither a forerunner is for us entered, Jesus, after the order of Melchizedek, made a priest for ever.*

The Soul's Anchor.

It is from this passage that our symbolic use of the anchor is derived; for an anchor is never mentioned in the Old Testament; nor elsewhere in the New except in its literal sense in connection with the shipwreck of St Paul. (Acts xxvii. 14, 29, 40.) And yet it has passed into the very fibre of our thought, so exactly does it express our conception of the promise, firm itself, strong, but requiring (as the beginning of this chapter affirmed so solemnly) that we should for our part firmly lay hold upon that which lays hold upon eternal things. Little avails the anchor when the chain has parted. It is not the anchor, but the sure and steadfast hope, which is said to enter within the veil (so that the charge of mixed metaphor is baseless), yet the expression is somewhat influenced by thought of the reliance of the mariner on that which has passed beyond his vision, but which grasps realities underlying the shifting tides, realities he knows and trusts even if he cannot define them. So has our hope passed within the veil. And more is there to be relied upon than any hope. Our Lord Himself is there for us, representing us, our Forerunner, and called again by His kindest human name, Jesus.

We saw that a priest represents his brethren and appears for them; so that his office expresses at once the exclusion and the hope of man, seeking after God. But no priest except ours was in heaven

Warning and Cheer

itself the actual herald and forerunner of his brethren. Hebrews Christ is this, and therefore He is a priest of a new ^{vi.} type, a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The precise import of this declaration we are now, after so many preliminary discussions, ready to examine.

HEBREWS VII

1. For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him ;

2. To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all ; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of Peace ;

3. Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life ; but, made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually.

4. Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.

5. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham :

6. But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises.

7. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.

8. And here men that die receive tithes ; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.

9. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham.

10. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.

11. If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron ?

12. For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.

13. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar.

14. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda ; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

15. And it is yet far more evident : for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest,

16. Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.

17. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Hebrews vii

18. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.

19. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did ; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

20. And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest :

21. (For those priests were made without an oath ; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec :)

22. By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

23. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death ;

24. But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

25. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

26. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens ;

27. Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's : for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

28. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity ; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

VII

THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

Hebrews
vii.

¹ *For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the Kings, and blessed him, ²to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all (first being by interpretation king of righteousness, and after that King of Salem, which is King of Peace, ³without father, without mother, without pedigree, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, made like unto the Son of God) abideth a priest for ever.*

Melchizedek.

All that we know about Melchizedek is contained in three verses of the Book of Genesis. Elsewhere in the Old Testament he is mentioned only in one line (Gen. xiv. 18-20; Ps. cx. 4).

An Alien
Priesthood.

But that line is revolutionary. The most daring criticism will not deny that the Jewish religion, so impatient of any intrusion upon its ritual—so increasingly impatient, they tell us, as time went on—so resolute to keep its holy things in the hands of Israel, and within Israel in the hands of one tribe, and within Levi in the hands of a single family, nevertheless cherished in its bosom the death sentence of that system, in the announcement that the

The Order of Melchizedek

Divinely appointed priest, instituted by an oath of Hebrews Jehovah, should belong to an alien priesthood, ^{vii.} which could not officiate at their altars, perhaps Moabite, perhaps Canaanite, in any case unknown and unsanctioned by their law. Criticism delights to tell us how that system stiffened and dried up after the exile: is it not somewhat of a paradox to assign to such a period, except under the influence of a direct revelation, both this proclamation of an alien order of priesthood, and what is quite in the same line of thought, the sacrificial intercessions of Job for his children, without any intervention of any priest whatever?

Such a priest involved of necessity a change of the law against which his existence clashed. Nothing ^{The Law was Self-doomed.} indeed can be more striking than the manner in which all the ancient institutions of Judaism have been abrogated, and yet all has been retained which was within them as a soul within a body, so that the Christian religion, as really as the world around us, is a development of old ideas in newer and finer forms, impossible therefore to have been invented in the first century, as Mohammedanism was invented in the sixth. But we do not appreciate all the wonder of this evolution, until we perceive that the promise of it was part of the creed of Judaism itself, and is implied in such a verse as this, Thou art a priest after the order of Melchizedek, not of Aaron.

But why after the order of Melchizedek, of one so ^{A Mystery.} briefly mentioned, seen so dimly, and by such a passing glance? The writer feels that this is part of the significance of the type: this absence of any hint of

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Hebrews vii. qualifications required in every Hebrew priest cannot be accidental : we are entitled to find a meaning not only in all that we read, but also, where this is manifestly insufficient, in the studied silence concerning much that it was natural to tell. *All* is significant, or else there is not enough significance to make his great place intelligible.

His Name. The first consideration is his name. The names of Abraham, Sarah, Jacob were all charged with meaning, and it was not possible to neglect the import of his name who was himself a type, Melchizedek, the King of Righteousness. And his title was equally remarkable, King of Salem, which is King of Peace.

Their Order. Even the order of these attributes is emphasised, because it is written in the Old Testament 'the work of righteousness shall be peace,' and in the New Testament 'the wisdom that is from above, first indeed is pure, then peaceable' (Isa. xxxii. 17 ; Jas. iii. 17).

Fulfilled in Christ. Our Lord was actually King, first of righteousness and only then of peace. He is the righteous Branch, the King Who reigns in righteousness. He says, 'Depart from Me,' to all them that work iniquity. Therefore the first effect of His coming was to estrange man from man : it was not to bring peace but a sword, so that a man's foes were they of his own household. And yet He was the Prince of Peace, and at His birth the angels sang 'Upon earth peace.' This peace began only in the hearts of men whose conscience and their lives He reconciled, stilling the civil war within them, enabling them to do the things which they would. But soon His

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peace turned again the hearts of parents to their **Hebrews** children, from whom (as He foretold) His first **vii.** operations had estranged them. Kindlier influences than the world had ever known began to draw men closer. The circle of this attraction expanded with a slow but majestic persistency. Except among savages, the horrors of ancient war are impossible and almost inconceivable to-day; and the time is coming when nation shall not lift up spear against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. 'For,' says an old writer, 'the dominion which He hath founded, which is the Church, hath peace with God, and seeketh peace with men.' But such peace is demonstrably consequent upon His reign first as the King of Righteousness. By making hearts sensitive and consciences tender, He has abolished half the causes of human dissension, and extracted half the virus of the rest.

Other deep aspects of this two-fold royalty unfold themselves as we ponder it. He is the King of Righteousness, 'through whom we are both reckoned righteous and are so indeed, so that He "is made unto us righteousness"; and also the King of our Peace, both reconciling us to God, and also breaking down the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, so making peace; and by His righteousness and perfect obedience He hath released us from all sin. For this peace is co-operative with the righteousness of God.'

The King of
Righteous-
ness and of
Peace.

Nor is there any other king of these dominions. Every theory, every gain, every pleasure that shakes His authority over men goes to make them tyrannous

—And the
Only King.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
vii. and aggressive, or else lawless and unjust. All the world over, He is the King at once of righteousness and of peace.

It is a strange and spiritual sovereignty. And it was curiously prefigured by that of Melchizedek, of whom we read not that he struck a blow in the war of the Five Kings and the Four; but that he 'came forth' to bless the valiant champion of the right.

Without
Ancestry. To be a priest under the law, one's father should be of the family of Levi—it was for disputing this that Korah was destroyed—and his mother should be of pure Hebrew blood. But the mysterious priesthood of Melchizedek is traced back to no progenitor: he stands alone: he is 'possessor not inheritor' of his authority, and as regards his position the record exhibits him 'without father, without mother, without genealogy.'

Details
Withheld. From these words strange theories have been derived of a mysterious being, preternatural in origin and caught up at last into the skies. But it is not said that Melchizedek was in these respects inherently upon the level of Christ: the phraseology when examined is remarkable and significant: he was 'made to be like unto the Son of God'—surely, by the silence of the narrative, in the face of which silence he is chosen out to be the typical priest. For the history is full of details concerning the birth and death of all other important actors in the great drama; we know their parents, their dying benedictions, their arrangements concerning their sepulchre; but among all these the most profoundly significant, he whose significance God Himself affirms

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with an oath, comes forth for one moment from the Hebrews unknown, and disappears into the unknown again in vii. silence. He is thus 'made like unto' Him whose goings forth have been from everlasting and of the increase of Whose kingdom there is no end.

It is quite demonstrable that no actual permanence of the priesthood of Melchizedek himself is intended. 'After the Order of Melchizedek.' For this would shut out the possibility of a successor in his office, which is the very thing to be established. If Christ were on earth He would not be a priest at all, seeing that there are those who offer the gifts according to the law. The place is filled (viii. 4). How then should He be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, if that priesthood also were still held by Melchizedek himself? It is therefore plain that what is relied upon is the selection, as his type, of one concerning whom all such details, essential under the law, are unrecorded and irrelevant ones, and whose 'order' has never been abrogated, since it survives in the days of the Psalmist. 'The comparison,' as Bishop Westcott well put it, 'is not between Christ and Melchizedek, but between Christ and the isolated portraiture of Melchizedek' (*Ep. to the Hebrews, in loco*, p. 173). And so Chrysostom had written 'Melchizedek is set forth as having neither beginning of days nor end of life, not because he had them not, but because the genealogy is not given; but Jesus . . . having neither temporal beginning nor end: the one indeed was a shadow, the other the truth' (Ps. cx).

It is plain that all this argument, and pre-eminently this argument even from silence, must stand or fall

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
vii.

Authority
of the Old
Testament.

with the spiritual authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. What sort or degree of inspiration it demands, whether the process of shaping the narrative was entirely such as our fathers believed, whether we can be certain of the date of their composition, or that they have been transmitted to us intact in form—none of these questions need concern our present study. But this great Epistle presupposes at least that for the edification of our souls we may question these narratives not only carefully but minutely, since there is a profound meaning and message, not only in what is written for our learning, but even in what is intentionally and deliberately withheld from us. If we deny this, the New Testament will soon fall about us in the same ruin with the Old. While we firmly hold this, we can await with composure the issue of present controversies, however trying they may appear. Nothing can be more remarkable than the combination, all through this argument, of the most daring rejection of Old Testament institutions and the most deferential reliance upon the Old Testament itself.

⁴Now consider how great this Man was, to whom Abraham, the patriarch, even gave the tenth of the best spoils. ⁵And indeed those from among the sons of Levi who receive the priesthood have a commandment to take tythes of the people according to the law, that is of their brethren, though sprung from the loins of Abraham. ⁶But he who has no genealogy from these took tythes of Abraham, and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷And without any contradiction the less is blessed of the better.

The Order of Melchizedek

The argument advances from Melchizedek in himself to Melchizedek in his relations with Abraham and the law. And his superiority is at once established by the fact that the patriarch, the venerated father of the Jewish race, gave him tythes and received his benediction.

Hebrews
vii.
Abraham
paid Tythes.

A divine revelation had emancipated Abraham from the idolatries of his race ; and to make the severance more complete, he had been called into a strange land, and sustained in his exile by splendid promises. These were the charter of his race : all that the Jewish nation and the Hebrew church possessed they held from him ; and assuredly the family of Levi could claim no independent greatness of its own, but stood or fell with him.

We read of no such revelation to Melchizedek. He represented apparently the primitive knowledge and worship, uncorrupted since Noah left the ark. In this respect his office was sharply contrasted with that priesthood which only came into being under the law ; and Abraham, the lonely wanderer from land to land, the priest in his family who offered sacrifices for them, did homage to this more ancient knowledge of his God, and to the royal priesthood of Melchizedek.

Only some elect sons of Levi were priests : these were expressly appointed, and took their tythes by virtue of an ordinance from heaven : those whom they tythed were their brethren, sons of Abraham like themselves : and their rights extended no further, being entirely intertribal. All this is recited to magnify the superiority of Melchizedek. For be-

Not all
Levites were
Priests.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews vii. tween him and Abraham there existed no such tie: the homage of the patriarch admitted that his rule extended far beyond his own family; and it was yielded not in obedience to any formal injunction, but at the prompting of an inborn and instinctive reverence.

The Homage of Abraham. We may well believe that Abraham recognised with awe the organised and established worship of his God Who had led him up from Ur of the Chaldees. We may reflect that the hour in which he found himself no longer an obscure wanderer but a deliverer and vanquisher of Kings was a fit time for his grateful heart to do homage to the priest of the Most High God. But the important fact is the incontrovertible one, that Abraham owned the religious superiority of Melchizedek by paying tythes to him.

The Benediction. More than this, Melchizedek blessed him who had the promises, which were so rich and great that he might well have supposed himself to be set far beyond all human blessing.

Yet he accepted this formal and express benediction from Melchizedek, which put their relative positions out of question. For always the less is blessed by the greater. There is indeed a free movement of the heart in praise or prayer, in which we say, 'Bless the Lord O my Soul,' and the citizens of the golden city sing, 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever.' But the difference is plain. No ceremonial benediction is ever pronounced by the Levite on the priest, nor by

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the priest on the high-priest, nor by the Son upon the Father. It was in his capacity as priest that Melchizedek blessed him who had the promises. And in him, the argument goes on to show, he blessed also the descendants of the patriarch, represented in their sire. Hebrews vii.

⁸ And here, dying men receive tythes: there, he of whom it is testified that he liveth. ⁹ And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi who receives tythes has paid tythes, for he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Hitherto, we have seen that the Levitical priesthood is lower than that of Melchizedek: the thought henceforth is not only of comparative inferiority but of positive imperfection. The new note is struck in the contrast between mere men, 'dying men' who receive tythes 'here,' and one, whose nature and abode are only hinted as yet, but of whom it is testified that He liveth. Levitical Inadequacy.

It is almost impossible to doubt that the mode of expression is influenced by thoughts of Christ the antitype. But it has to do in the first place with Melchizedek; and the best commentary upon it is the earlier phrase 'having neither beginning of days nor end of life' (ver. 3) with its bold inference from that silence of the Old Testament by which Melchizedek was 'made like unto the Son of God.'

The argument passes on to insist that Levi had no personal greatness, all his claim was derived from his father, so that when Abraham did homage, Levi did homage in him. Thus the limitations of the

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews powers of an English monarch are those also of his
vii. successor, but they would not bind a conqueror founding a new dynasty. Levi paid tythes in Abraham. But Christ, Who is after the order of Melchizedek, did not.

At this point the discussion passes quite away from the historical event, the brief and scanty record of the interview of Melchizedek with Abraham. It is curious, and surely significant, that the only detail on which nothing is founded is that gift of bread and wine upon which Roman commentators so much insist. The Epistle does not even mention it.

**A Sup-
position.**

Before we pass on, it is worth while to linger for a moment with a perfectly conceivable hypothesis. Suppose those three verses in Genesis to have been non-existent, the narrative in other respects remaining unchanged. Suppose that we now learned, for the first time, by the decyphering of some old inscription, that the father of the faithful, to whom all Judaism looks back as its founder, the recipient of the promises which are its title deeds, that he, to whom, as we assert, God came by a direct revelation, and who only is called the friend of God, was actually in communication with an older priest of his own religion (which we declared him to have received by revelation) paid him tribute, and bent his head under his benediction, what use would the assailants of the faith make of a disclosure such as this? What agonies of alarm would torture those good people who were weak enough to grow pale when we learned that just

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about this time Hammurabi promulgated a code of Hebrews law which may have influenced the laws of Israel? ^{vii.}

And yet we know that such an alarm would be ridiculous and baseless. All good is of God, and His saints in the Old Testament and in the New welcome it and profit by it all.

¹¹ *If then perfection were by the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people hath received the law), what further need was there that a different priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek, and be called not after the order of Aaron?* ¹² *For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is made also a change of law.* ¹³ *For He, of whom these things are said belongeth to another tribe, of which no man hath attended at the altar.* ¹⁴ *For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung from Judah, of which tribe Moses said nothing concerning priesthood.* ¹⁵ *And it is yet more abundantly evident, if after the order of Melchizedek ariseth another priest,* ¹⁶ *who hath been made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an indissoluble life.* ¹⁷ *For it is witnessed of Him, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

The first readers of this Epistle, however sorely they had been tempted to 'draw back' into Judaism, must by this time have perceived that the whole of the ancient system, as a way of salvation, was self-condemned. Its priesthood was but a temporary provision; and on the basis of the priesthood the law was built. These were in the act of passing

Supersession
implies
Defect.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews vii. away together; but since God is not a God of wanton change, this must have been due to some 'further need,' some imperfection which condemned them both together, and justified the announcement of another priesthood, belonging to another tribe. For our Lord sprang¹ out of Judah. And even more decisive in the controversy than this fact in history—which, it is noteworthy, could at this early period be declared incontrovertible—was the undeniable announcement in prophecy. Thou art a priest for ever after the order of a foreigner, whose every ceremonial act must be a transgression and an assault upon the Hebrew system. How then was He appointed? What was the programme and what the investiture of this new priesthood? It is inaugurated without ritual, without any ceremony: the Lord simply announces it as a fact: 'Thou art' already 'a priest for ever.' And with this agrees the abrupt appearance of his type in the story of Abraham, with no hint of his origin or his consecration.

'Thou art a Priest.'

Now this is characteristic and essential. Rightly understood, the imposing ceremonials of Aaron's investiture spoke his doom, if only because they

¹ He 'sprang.' The verb refers either to the springing up of vegetation, in which case the allusion is the Rod out of the stem of Jesse, a new growth out of old roots, a sapling from a fallen tree; or else it refers to the Day-spring in the skies. How intimately the two ideas were connected (partly, no doubt, by the familiar employment of this term for both) we may see by the words 'I am the Root and Offspring of David, and the bright, the morning Star' (Rev. xxii. 16). It is to be noted that the now familiar title of Christ, 'our Lord,' is given to Him here only in Scripture. In the Revelation it is used of the Father (xi. 15).

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were ceremonials. The robes that were put upon ^{Hebrews} him, breastplate and ephod and mitre, would some ^{vii.} day be stripped off him again (Num. xx. 28) and were in themselves carnal and perishable things: the beginning implied the end of them. Carnal also were the conditions of his priesthood, a pedigree, bodily flawlessness, ceremonial purity. And carnal, as we shall be shown presently, were the sacrifices and the shrine of his ministrations. What was here for souls to rest upon?

But Christ is our Priest in the spiritual city: there He sits on the right hand of God, who swore to Him 'Thou art a priest for ever.' None other was capable of such an office, than He who received it in the fulness of power to wield it; the 'power of a life,' against which time beats in vain, and which it was impossible for death to hold, which is therefore not only 'endless,' but (as the word means) indissoluble. Much of the following argument is an expansion of these great words, and in them the religious as distinguished from the historical exaltation of our Priest comes plainly to the front.

¹⁸ *For there is an annulling of a precedent commandment for its weakness and unprofitableness,*
¹⁹ *for the law made nothing perfect, and [there is] a bringing in thereupon of a better hope, through which we draw nigh to God.*

The prediction has two sides. It cancels the ^{A Two-} previous institutions and the commandment, the law, ^{sided} which was based on these; and it introduces a better ^{Prediction.} hope, the hope which animates Christian worship

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews and draws us nigh to God. The commandment is annulled because it is weak and unprofitable—and this is an enlargement of the previous assertion that perfection was not through the Levitical priesthood (ver. 11). Unfallen creatures might possibly need only a guide; and a law might suffice to guide them, though we remember that the precept of Eden did not guard Paradise from the Fall. But the mightiest powers of religion in the human soul are a sense of sin and a longing for emancipation; and these law cannot relieve, nor yet (as we presently learn) can the animal sacrifices of Judaism.

The True
Work of
Law.

If now we ask why this law, so weak and unprofitable, was interposed even for awhile, St Paul has answered us. It entered that sin might abound in the consciousness of man. By the law was the knowledge of sin. Unless men had striven in vain with the divine challenge ‘this do’—this!—‘and thou shalt live,’ they would never have been content to accept the lowly righteousness of faith, and the free gift of everlasting life. The weakness and unprofitableness of mere law were really what the law had to teach us, shutting us up unto the righteousness of faith by showing that there was no passage elsewhere. The promise was also the introduction into religion of a better hope, the hope of a sublime priest, with the oath of God for His credentials, enthroned with God even when in the act of intercession, and partaker of His immortality. By this hope we draw nigh unto God. In the eleventh chapter we shall learn that there never was a time when the human soul was left without divine hopes and promises to rely

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upon, and that through all the Jewish epoch there **Hebrews** were men who lived and died by faith. But when **vii.** we read that through this hope we draw nigh to God, something more is declared of us: we ourselves are priests, and it is our function, on behalf of others, to appear before Him. The note thus struck resounds through the remainder of the Epistle.

²⁰ And inasmuch as not without an oath—for they indeed without an oath are made priests, ²¹ but He with an oath by Him who said unto Him, The Lord swear and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever —²² by so much also is Jesus become the surety of a better covenant.

What was this oath of God, and when was it given? An old commentator answers, this is none other than the purpose, by no means to be subverted, of the divine decree. He is right. But perhaps we may recognise in it also the immutable assurance given by the Eternal Father to the consciousness of the Eternal Son, whom He addresses. It has no date in time, and is not so much an event as an abiding certainty made manifest. And this gives a sublime force to the present tense ‘Thou ART.’ **‘The Lord Sware.’** **‘Thou Art.’**

Contrast with it the possibility of the degradation of a Hebrew priest for misconduct, and the historic fact that the priesthood was transferred by Solomon to the family of Zadok from that of Abiathar (1 Kings ii. 35). By so much the surety of a better covenant is Jesus, says the Epistle, holding back the proper name to the end for emphasis, employing for the same object the word ‘surety’ (which is not

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Hebrews
vii. elsewhere in the New Testament in Greek or English) instead of 'Mediator,' which is frequent, and introducing the thought, new in this connection, of a Covenant to attest instead of a cause to plead. This also is among the thoughts which are presently renewed and amplified.

²³ And they indeed have been many priests through death forbidding them to abide ; ²⁴ but He through continuing for ever hath unchangeable His priesthood. ²⁵ Wherefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come through Him to God, ever living to make intercession for them.'

The One
Immortal.

This is a further and very obvious contrast : the devolution of their priesthood was not only possible but inevitable : death forbade them to continue : between Aaron and the destruction of the Temple there were seventy priests. 'But,' asks one, 'did not Christ also die, and thus bring His priesthood to a close ?' And he answers, 'In dying He did not terminate His office, but began thereupon to perform its function, appearing before God for us.' He exceeds the Jewish priests as far as the immortal overtops the mortal ; and since His office cannot be unworthy of His person, as He continueth ever He hath His priesthood unchangeable. 'Hence it follows that Christ hath neither successors nor vicars in His priesthood.'

For these two reasons, with inexhaustible vitality, and with a priesthood which no unworthiness of ours can alienate, nor frequency of appeal tire out, which is not only enduring but unchangeable,

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He is able to save to the uttermost of our need, to Hebrews
the uttermost also of our experiences through time ^{vii.}
and unto eternity, all who come through Him to
God. It is He who said 'I am the Way . . . no
man cometh unto the Father but by Me.' In Him
we realise what ancient priesthoods could only at
the best foreshadow ; we are ourselves brought nigh,
not to an earthly sanctuary, but to the very presence
of God in heaven. And this He can do, because
He ever liveth with the intention of interceding
for His own. It is not enough that He ever liveth
who is a Priest, but He is a Priest for ever.

*²⁶ For such a high priest became us, who is holy,
harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners and
made higher than the heavens, ²⁷ who needeth not
daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first
for His own sins and then for those of the people, for
this [offering of sacrifice] He did once for all, when
He offered up Himself. ²⁸ For the law appointeth
men high priests who have infirmity, but the word
of the oath which is since the law appointeth [one
who is] Son, perfected for evermore.*

Such a high priest became us. All our deficiencies Such a High
Priest.
are met, when He unites our cause with His own
sacred intercession ; and in union with Him we are
uplifted toward all the vocation of the saints. In
respect of God, He is holy ; in Himself He is
harmless and guileless ; He is unsullied in His
relations with the evil world. There He once
received sinners and ate with them, yet took no
taint ; but now He is separated from all such

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Hebrews contact much more perfectly than those earthly
vii. priests, who were forbidden to 'go out of the sanctuary or to profane the sanctuary of "their" God' (Lev. xxi. 12). He also abides in the true sanctuary, and in dignity, as in person, 'becomes' our highest aspirations, being made higher than the heavens.

'Not Daily.' He needs not to repeat His sacrifice, like those high priests, daily. But why 'daily'? It is straining the point too far to call it an expression of scorn, as if they 'needed' to do that every day which they actually did annually; or as if, since they had to perform it annually, they might as well do it every day. Rather it is because the daily sacrifices were only a lowlier edition of the great annual atonement; and the priests who offered these were the representatives and vicars of the high priest. Every day the recurring sacrifice declared that the last had spent its force: sin existed still: the offering had need to be renewed.

**Not for
Himself.**

Moreover, the high priest offered two sacrifices, and twice sprinkled blood upon the sanctuary; first a bullock for his own sins and the sins of his house, before he was qualified to act on behalf of the nation (Lev. xvi. 11-15). But Christ offered only one sacrifice for sins for ever; He did this once for all; and to make it plain that no sins of His own were there, a totally new consideration of primary importance is brought forward, which is presently to be expanded and enforced. The sacrifice which Christ offered was Himself.

**He was His
own
Offering.**

Of no other priest was this conceivable. The law

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appointed men, men who themselves, equally with Hebrews their fellows, had infirmities to be expiated. But ^{vii.} the later and loftier announcement was of a Priest who was indeed man—as this Epistle presently insists—but was also a Son. And as He passed within the veil, His official equipment was completed: He was perfected for evermore.

It remains that we should observe and imitate the writer, who makes all this his own concern, and no mere theoretical dogma. By this hope we draw nigh unto God. Such a high priest became us. We have such a High Priest.

HEBREWS VIII

1. Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum : We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens ;

2. A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man

3. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices : wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.

4. For if he were on earth he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law :

5. Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle : for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.

6. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises :

7. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8. For, finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah :

9. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt ; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord ; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts ; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people :

11. And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord : for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

13. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

VIII

THEIR COVENANT AND OURS

¹ *Now this is the chief point in the things which* Hebrews *we are saying, we have such a high priest, Who sat* viii. *down on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens,* ² *a minister of the holy places, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.*

‘After all,’ the tempted convert may rejoin, ‘the Aaronic priesthood and ritual are here : we see them ^{The} and they speak to us : their impression may be ^{Invisible.} sensuous, but it is effectual ; and by such impressions our souls have been stirred since childhood.

‘And your Priest is very far away. We strive to think of Him ; but our senses do not help our worship : His greatness may be real, but it is invisible.’

We can feel with such an objector. How strong is the wizardry of a spectacular service, an elaborate apparatus, of robes and incense and a visible sacrifice, the Church has always felt, and too often she has tried to incorporate these methods with her own. But this Epistle shows us a more excellent way. It meets all such influences by quickening our faith in the invisible, until we feel that the real Priest and

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Hebrews viii. His offering are the more impressive because they are beyond the veil, and that indeed they are too great to have their sphere on earth.

The close of the entire argument of this Epistle is a set contrast between the utmost magnificence of Judaism—Sinai burning with fire, blackness and darkness, tempest and trumpet-blast and the voice which shook the world—and the silent grandeurs of our spiritual Zion (to which we are actually come), with the angels and the spirits of the just, and God the Judge and Jesus the Mediator. We know which is more really sublime. The volcano burns out: the silent stars shine on.

**At the Right
Hand of
God.**

Here also the appeal is to the spiritual against the magnificent. It is not on earth, to be compared or contrasted with the sons of Aaron, because He is where the Old Testament foretold that He should be. For the Psalm in which we read that He is a Priest for ever opens with the words, 'Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, until Thine enemies be made Thy footstool' (Ps. cx. 1). He is invisible to us because He has taken that awful seat, and remains expectant there. To describe His enthronement, all the resources of language are drawn upon: 'He sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.' As we read we feel the contrast between those who bore in their trembling hands the atonement for their own transgressions and Him who, at the call of His Father, has gone up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.

It follows, as a distinct element in His greatness,

Their Covenant and Ours

that, like Melchizedek, He is King as well as Priest, **Hebrews** and Himself governs, defends, and guides those for **viii.** whom He intercedes. Now these offices were given **A Kingly Priest.** by the law to entirely different tribes.

Thus sitting He is yet 'a minister' (as we presently read that 'every high priest ministereth,' ix. 12); and hereupon a fresh reason appears for His absence, in the body, from our world. For He is the minister of those realities which earthly shrines can only shadow forth, of the holy places, and the real tabernacle, which the Lord pitched,¹ not man.

What is this true tabernacle? Devout and able **The True Tabernacle.** commentators have explained it of His own sacred Body, the true shrine of deity, of which He said, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,' and of which the veil is His flesh (Jno. ii. 19; Heb. x. 20). But here, and in connection with His priestly office, this explanation leads to hopeless confusion; for neither does He present His sacrifice to Himself, the Deity within His veil of flesh, nor is it possible to think of Him as appearing, within Himself as a shrine, for us. We are not helped by combining with this, as Alford does, the thought of His mystical Body the Church. He is not a priest to His Church, but for it. And indeed the thought is simple enough, for one who reads it simply. It is in closest connection with the majesty 'in the heavens' that we read of 'the

¹ This remarkable phrase comes from the story of Balaam in the lxx., who says, of the goodly tabernacles of Jacob, that they are 'as shady groves, and as gardens by a river, and as tabernacles which the Lord pitched.' It is a good example of the fact, too frequently forgotten, that quotation in Holy Scripture, as everywhere else, may serve a purely literary purpose.

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Hebrews holy places and the true tabernacle.' And presently
viii. we are told in so many words that He 'has not entered into the holy places made with hands . . . but into heaven itself' (ix. 24).

³ For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is necessary that this high priest should also have somewhat to offer. ⁴ Now if He were on earth He would not be a priest at all, seeing that there are priests who offer the gifts according to law. ⁵ Who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, even as Moses was admonished when about to make the tabernacle, for see, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern shown thee in the Mount.

Every priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. The essence of his office is this presentation of the blood of the sacrifices in the sanctuary. The slaying of them was not seldom done by another and a subordinate hand. Now Christ presents His offering in heaven. No theory of the atonement which relies on the influence upon man of His beautiful and devoted life (except as an altogether secondary consequence) can stand against the persistent representation of Scripture, that He presents His blood on our behalf in the highest heavens to God.

The
Atonement.

No theory which argues, because 'the blood is the life,' that therefore it is the life of Christ, not His death, which saves us, can resist the cumulative effect of all the texts which insist that He died for us . . . to bring us to God; that He bore our sins

Their Covenant and Ours

in His body, not throughout Palestine but on the Hebrews tree; that He was slain and redeemed us by His blood. 'The blood is the life' indeed, in that much quoted passage; but it goes on to declare that it is 'on the altar' that it makes atonement for souls (Lev. xvii. 11). Why is it not once said that He bought us by His example, that He redeemed us by His life?

Moreover, He could not be a priest on earth, because the office is preoccupied: there are priests who offer the sacrifices according to law. This is the text which proves beyond question that this book, with its vast conception of the dignity and office of Christ, was written before the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70, that is to say, less than forty years after his death.

It is to be observed that the old order is recognised as retaining its authority, though at the point to die. It is not supposed that any devout person, however clear his perception of its vanity and evanescence, will put himself into wilful collision with an institution divinely sanctioned.

The Earthly
Priesthood
is Recognised.

Now this respect for law and order contrasts very suggestively with some quick and wayward methods of our modern days. Perhaps our headstrong methods show more self-reliance than reliance on the unseen. Perhaps if we had more faith we should be willing to wait more patiently, to let the fading petals fall away as the fruit ripens. St Paul made a point of going up to Jerusalem to Jewish feasts; and here we read that Christ Himself, if still on earth, would not have thrust the Hebrew pontiff from his place.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
viii.

But now consider whether the writer of these words can have supposed himself, at this very time, to exercise the sacerdotal functions on earth which he declared it impossible that his Lord should assume.

The
Exemplar
and the
Shadow.

These priests do service only in a world of shadows, and a shrine of human workmanship. Moses made it; and as he did so he was admonished to look well that he made all things after a pattern, so that his work was no more than the shadow of that shadow revealed to him on the mount, of which the reality was in the heavens. This reality no earthly presentation could obscure, nor could any mortal priesthood claim to supersede its ministrations. There Jesus ministers for us. And His intercession is calmer and more majestic than some of our religious literature represents: free from passion and from importunity, because 'the counsel of peace is between both' His offices, who is king as well as priest: and His priesthood is that of one who sits at the right hand of power, who needs only to 'appear' for us: a royal priesthood. Now let us remember that the chief thing in the argument is our interest in all this—'We have such a high priest.'

Meantime the law had its meaning. Its institutions were no more than an ensample and shadow; but they were this. Its sacrifices hinted the Sacrifice: its priests typified the Priest. And as the promise of Canaan sustained the faith of Abraham until it rose to conceive the City which hath the Foundations, so did men look through these institutions, and through the sense that these made

Their Covenant and Ours

nothing perfect, to some great future spiritual gift. **Hebrews**
Controversy does not betray this inspired writer to **viii.**
deny the real function of what God had given, any
more than the blind opposition of his countrymen
could provoke St Paul to forget that the law was our
schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. But its part is
played. 'We have' the true Priest, and He pleads
for us the true sacrifice.

*⁶ But now hath He obtained a ministry the more
excellent, by so much as He is the Mediator of a
better covenant, which hath been established upon
better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had
been faultless, no place would have been sought for a
second. ⁸ For, finding fault with them He saith,
Behold, days are coming, saith the Lord, when I will
make a new covenant with the house of Israel and
with the house of Judah, ⁹ not according to the
covenant which I made with their fathers, in the
day of My taking them by the hand to lead them out
of the land of Egypt; for they continued not in
My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the
Lord.*

Still pursuing the argument that the Old Testament
is aware of its own inferiority and expectant of
something better than it possesses, we are reminded
of the prediction of a better covenant, established
upon better promises. Before the institution of sin-
offerings, or of the Hebrew priesthood, and as the
condition precedent to these, came that covenant of
which Moses was the mediator. As mediator he
received it from God, propounded it to the nation,

**The Old
Testament
expects the
New.**

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
viii. and invited their pledge to observe it. But an ordinary pledge was not enough. After sacrifices, he solemnly read to them all the Book of the Covenant, and they answered, 'All that the Lord hath spoken we will do, and will be obedient.' Thereupon he sprinkled them with half the blood of the sacrifices (of which the other half, representing the share of God in the treaty, had already been poured upon the altar), and said, 'Behold the blood of the Covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words.' This was the sole national Covenant, and it is unlike any subsequent event in the history of Israel (Exod. xxiv. 1-8).¹

Secular. Now this was established upon purely secular promises. Their days should be long in the land. An angel should lead them into the promised land. The Lord would be an enemy to their enemies, He would bless their bread and their water, and take away sickness from them. He would enlarge their borders. He would deliver the inhabitants of the land into their hands.

But what were these secular promises to a soul which thirsted for the Living God Himself? And a covenant of works, however effectual for such as had strength to keep it, what could it avail for one whom the iniquity of his heels compassed about, and who confessed that against God he had sinned and done evil in His sight? No wonder that the prophet was

¹ The promises to Noah, Abraham, and others are in a sense Covenants and are called so. But they are not of the same formal character as this, which might almost be called a negotiation. Accordingly, Jeremiah thinks of the Covenant in Exodus as 'the first Covenant.'

Their Covenant and Ours

inspired to tell of a better promise, and a covenant Hebrews which should bring aid in doing, as well as reward viii. for what was done.

But what are we to think of the words, 'if that Faulty. first covenant had been faultless,' when we know that it was divinely given? Its reproach is only that of weakness and insufficiency to save, because it was never meant to be the way of salvation. In the eleventh chapter we shall read how men lived and died 'by faith,' all through the period of the law. But the law itself was a revelation of the demand of God, not an inspiration in the doing of it. Its use was temporary and preliminary, it was a stair and not a landing-place. But the culpability lay with the disobedient hearers: the prophet was 'finding fault with them,' not with it. However, since of such material it could make nothing perfect, Jeremiah foretold another covenant. The context in which he did so was remarkable. A new exodus from captivity was to eclipse that from Egypt: the long-divided kingdoms, now reunited, were not to envy or to vex each other any more. But to produce these results new influences were required. The prophet had witnessed the failure of Josiah to reform Judah by the law; and he felt the need of something far more spiritual. This God would give. He announced a new Covenant 'with the house of The New Israel and with the house of Judah,' which God Covenant. would not only promulgate but render effectual, by writing it, not like the first upon tables of stone, but upon tables which were hearts of flesh.

'Which my *first* covenant they broke, and I

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews viii. regarded them not, saith the Lord.' The second clause is taken from the Greek Old Testament, but the Hebrew reads, 'Though I was a husband unto them.' Alas, 'I was'! Estrangement and divorce are in the words: they more than justify the New Testament phrase, though it be rather a paraphrase than a translation.

¹⁰ For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their understanding, and upon their heart will I write them; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. ¹¹ And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen and everyone his brother, saying Know the Lord; for all shall know Me, from the small one to the great. ¹² For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins will I remember no more.

¹³ In that He saith A new Covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which groweth old and aged is ready to disappear.

The New Covenant is written upon the two
The Intellect and the Heart. tables of the soul, the intelligence and the heart. In heart the Jews turned back to Egypt. They honoured God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him. And some means were to be discovered by which God would not only make His law simple and clear, but also win the affections to obey it. Those means the prophet does not specify. But we know them. The love of Christ constraineth us. The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath set us free from the law of sin and death.

Their Covenant and Ours

Christ has become the end of the law unto righteous- **Hebrews**
ness. It is the revelation of God in His life and **viii.**
death which makes obedience glad, because the law
is now written in our heart.

‘And I will be to them a God ; and they shall be **Ideals.**
to Me a people.’ The meaning of the original is
profound, and it is easy to overlook. All that God
is, He will prove Himself to be to them ; and they
in return shall be to Him the fulness of the ideal of
a people.

The grandeur of that conception which expanded
through the ages, from the time when He was the
Aggregate of all forces, or the abiding One amid all
change, the God of their fathers, in national perils
the Lord of Armies, and in their individual weakness
a Shepherd, until at the last men prayed to Our
Father in heaven, all this power and love they
should actually experience : He would be for them
all that is meant when we worthily and intelligently
speak of God.

And they—My people who do not consider, My
people who ‘would none of Me’—shall now rise
to the true conception of a nation, obedient and
loving, loyal and law-abiding, and they shall be all
this for Him.

It is inherent in the conception of such a nation
that it should know and love its king. Accordingly **Knowledge.**
they shall not need to bid fellow-citizen or brother
to know the Lord, because all shall know Him.
This does not and cannot mean that they shall
desire no further instruction, and need none ; or how
could the writer justify his own Epistle? But it

The Epistle to the Hebrews

**Hebrews
viii.** asserts that except through wilful lapse they should no longer need the milk of inexperienced babes, but the strong meat of the full-grown. It asserts also that no soul of man shall be at the mercy of any authoritative and despotic lord over God's heritage, since every one shall be in vital and personal communion with its Lord.

All this is due to the free grace of God (as indeed the prophet ascribes every stage in the process to Him); it is 'because I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins I will remember no more.' Now we have already seen that it is our High Priest who offers an effectual intercession for our sins.

Once more, he infers the ruin of the old covenant from the very fact that a new covenant follows it. This implies that the old was not only ancient but antiquated, and therefore about to vanish. While he wrote, the temple was rocking to its base.

HEBREWS IX

1. Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.

2. For there was a tabernacle made ; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread ; which is called the sanctuary.

3. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all ;

4. Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant.

5. And over it the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercyseat ; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

6. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God :

7. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people :

8. The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing :

9. Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience ;

10. Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

11. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building ;

12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh :

14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God ?

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15. And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

16. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

17. For a testament is of force after men are dead : otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

18. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood.

19. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,

20. Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.

21. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

22. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood ; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

23. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these ; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

24. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true ; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us :

25. Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others ;

26. For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world : but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment :

28. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many ; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

IX

THEIR TABERNACLE AND OURS

¹ Now the first covenant also had ordinances of Hebrews ritual, and a Holy Place, according to the standard of ix. this world. ² For a Tabernacle was prepared, the outer one in which were the lamps and the table and the showing of the bread, which tabernacle was called Holy. ³ But after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called Holy of Holies ; ⁴ which had the golden altar of incense, and the Ark of the Covenant overlaid wholly with gold, in which were the golden pot which had the manna, and the rod of Aaron which budded, and the tables of the Covenant ; ⁵ and above this the Cherubim of glory shadowing the Mercy Seat, concerning which things we cannot now speak in detail (vers. 1-5).

In the Ninth Chapter we turn from the nature of priesthood in general, with that of Melchizedek and his ascendancy in particular, to consider in more detail the ordinances of the first covenant. There is some truth in the assertion that we pass from asserting the superiority of the new Covenant, to the positive shortcomings of the old. Like ours, it also had its prescribed method of worship, and its shrine, but a shrine set up on earth, and limited

Defective
Ordinances.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews ix. by the earthly resources of those who built it. How could anything so essentially of this world exalt its worshippers into the heavens, whither, even to the very throne of grace, we enter boldly when we pray?

**The
Tabernacle.**

As the Hebrew worshipper drew near, he perceived that the tabernacle was veiled, a place apart.

**The Holy
Place.**

Even when the curtain was lifted, it only showed him that the shrine was practically what this chapter calls it, two separate shrines; that the symbolic Presence was no nearer to be revealed: that the Lord dwelled in the thick darkness. Moreover, not even the outer shrine was free to him. Thither went the priests only, and these only in the way of duty, ministering and offering sacrifices. And there, in this outer court, not in the Presence, were visible the symbols of a holy world. There burned the seven lamps upon their lampstand, the Church exhibiting her light. And there was laid weekly upon the table the 'presence-bread' of the Old Testament, called here 'the exhibiting of the loaves,' before Him Who gives us all, in acknowledgment of man's dependence upon Him for his very life. Every week they were spread before Him: every week, as received from Him, the supply of the previous week was taken by the priests for food.

**The Most
Holy.**

Within, behind the second veil, was a more awful symbolism. But at this point a question of much complexity arises. The first to be mentioned of the furniture of the inner shrine is called by an ambiguous name, which clearly connects it with the incense, but allows us to understand either the censer or the altar of incense. Which is it? The

**The Altar of
Incense.**

Their Tabernacle and Ours

censer is but a poor thing to be mentioned in such a place: it was not specified at all among the details of the furnishing of the tabernacle; nor is a special censer for service in the Most Holy Place known to Scripture, though such a thing is mentioned elsewhere. It would never have been thought of in such a connection but for this difficulty, that the altar of incense was not actually in the Most Holy Place, but stood against and outside the curtain, plainly visible at the top of what is here called the first tabernacle, as often as the first curtain was raised. But the censer, just as much, cannot have been within the shrine, unless we are to believe that the high priest on the great day of atonement made a special entry to fetch it thence, which is incredible. What then are we to think? On examining the passage carefully, we find that it is not said to be within the Most Holy Place but only to belong to it. Now this very statement is made concerning the altar of incense in the Old Testament: it is 'the altar that belonged to the oracle' (1 Kings vi. 22). Though it stands outside the veil, it is significantly connected with it and with what it conceals; it is 'before the veil which is by the Ark of the testimony, before the mercy-seat, where I will meet with you.' It is itself, like the shrine, 'most holy'; and therefore, like the sacred things within, but like these only, it is solemnly sprinkled with blood upon the great day of atonement (Exod. xxx. 6, 10). Everything goes to show that it was reckoned to belong to the Most Holy Place, even though the necessity of burning

ix.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews ix. incense upon it every day required that it should be placed 'before the veil.'

Prayer. Now incense represents prayer. In the Old Testament the lifting up of our hands is as incense. In the Apocalypse the angel has a censer with much incense which is the prayers of the saints.

No symbolism could convey a message more encouraging. As the altar stood outside the curtain, in order to be accessible, yet close to it in order that the odour of its incense might most surely and promptly suffuse all the presence-chamber, so in our worship we may not shake off the limitations of time and space: God is in Heaven, and man upon the earth: yet our prayers reach Him and are accepted: He is very nigh unto us when we call upon Him: the altar of incense 'belongs to' His immediate dwelling-place.

The Ark. Within was the Ark of the Covenant, so called because it contained the tables on which, just before it was constructed, God had written the law, the terms of the first covenant. Its message (but not therefore the only message of the Old Testament) was that the man who doeth these things shall live by them. With it (and according to our Epistle, within it, as was natural) was the pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded, historic testimonies of how God had dealt with them, and of their ingratitude if they disobeyed Him. Unmentioned here, there was also the book of the law; and this is expressly declared to have been there 'as a testimony against them' (Deut. xxxi. 26).

It was therefore an alarming thought that exactly

Their Tabernacle and Ours

above the Ark of the violated Covenant, and the Hebrews memorials of God's unrequited goodness, burned the ^{ix.} visible manifestation of the glory of their injured The Mercy-seat. Benefactor. There was however another and more important symbol, the symbol of His mercy. It is a serious mistake to think of the mercy-seat as merely the lid of the ark; for it is provided, quite independently, and in a later chapter; and it is made of pure gold throughout, whereas the ark was of wood overlaid with gold. The intention is far different. Without it, God would have seemed to be gazing straight down upon His outraged law and broken covenant. By it, these were covered up from Him; so that it gave concrete expression to the prayer of the Psalmist, 'Hide Thy face from my sins.' It is necessary to observe that neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word has any suggestion of a 'seat' (which notion crept into our modern versions probably from the expression in the Psalms, 'God sitteth between the cherubim'), (Ps. lxxxviii. 1, etc.); nor can the original be derived from the word 'to cover'; nor is it sufficiently translated by 'mercy' pure and simple, and apart from the notion of propitiation. It is to all intents the same word ^{The} which reappears in 'the sin-offering for *atonement*' ^{Propitiatory.} in the 'atonement-money,' and in the 'day of *atonement*' itself. On that day, it was not only sprinkled with blood, like the other objects in the shrine: blood was also sprinkled in front of it seven times; while its part in the symbolism is so paramount that once at least the whole structure is called 'the house of the mercy-seat' (1 Chron. xxviii. 11).

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews ix. The Greek word is found again in the New Testament only in the verse 'Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation' (Rom. iii. 25), and there can be no doubt that the true meaning in both Testaments is that of 'the Propitiatory.'

Of these things the writer could not now speak in detail. He was not treating of the spiritual hints and hopes, which were the soul of Judaism : he was resisting the tendency to be content with Judaism in itself and for its own sake, which mistook the finger-post for the goal ; his task was to show that it was inadequate, shadowy, and therefore transitory ; and this he proceeds to show, not of each detail, but of the system regarded as a whole.

⁶ Now these things being thus prepared, the priests enter the first tabernacle at all times, performing the services ; ⁷ but the second, once in the year, the high priest only enters, not without blood which he offers for himself and for the ignorances of the people, ⁸ the Holy Ghost making this plain, that the way into the holy places was not yet manifest, while the first tabernacle had still a recognised place. ⁹ Which is a parable for the time now present, according to which parable both gifts and sacrifices were offered which were unable to make the worshipper perfect as concerning his conscience ¹⁰ being only (with meats and drinks and sundry washings) righteousnesses of the flesh until the time appointed for reformation.

God and the Conscience. So then with all this amplitude of preparation the result is spiritual bankruptcy. The soul of man is

Their Tabernacle and Ours

athirst for God. It cries, When shall I come and Hebrews appear in the presence of God? But Moses had no ix. answer for such a cry.

The priests indeed might enter the holy place: The Law could not Admit. this they constantly did, to burn incense, to renew the shewbread, even to trim the lamps. But between them and the Presence a heavy curtain hung. They knew no way into the Holiest, though their hearts must have burned to be so near and yet for ever banished. It was the proudest boast of the nation that God was in the midst of them; but yet He was a God that hideth Himself. The one brief and rare exception was when the high priest entered the very shrine, and then it was with blood, which he should offer for himself first, before he might offer 'for the ignorances of others.' Such a priest (and it is presently urged, such sacrifices also) could never reassure a guilty soul. Nor may we overlook the statement that those sacrifices were offered for 'the ignorances' of the people. Sins with a high hand were expressly excluded from their range (Numbers xv. 28-30). But Christ said, All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men; He called to Himself and to His rest all men, whatever the burden upon their souls. Or again, might it not be pleaded that all sin is really sin of ignorance? Who ever yet realised the awfulness of the law he broke, the consequences he incurred, the God he insulted? Even of those who nailed their Lord to the cross He said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

All this failure of the law to take away sin was

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
ix.

But by law
the Holy
Spirit
taught.

consistent with the frankest recognition of its true function and divine origin. The Holy Ghost was teaching by these symbols, if men would only accept the lesson which they really taught.

They could not show the way to a perfect communion with God, nor even to a perfect release from the burdens of the conscience; but they did say, Be patient! wait! the way is not yet thrown open, but why has He drawn so near? And what means it that one who is confessedly himself unworthy is actually, though but for a moment, admitted on your behalf into the shrine? The Holy Ghost Himself had been saying to them, Not yet! while the outer tabernacle had still its recognised place in the arrangement. The temple was not yet overthrown, but an unearthly Hand had cancelled the seclusion of the oracle, when the veil was rent asunder, not as men might have torn it, but downward and from the top. Here indeed was the completion of the symbolism: the way into the Holiest was made manifest.

A Parable.

The tabernacle, then, with all its services, was 'a parable¹ for the present time.' And the present time is not here contrasted with times past (as if the lesson were inscrutable until Christ came), but with the day which was then dawning, the time of reformation, the coming age. It means to say that this great parable, concrete and splendid, was for the instruction of the ancient dispensation, even then, even

¹ Except once more in this Epistle (xi. 19) this word is found again only in the Synoptic Gospels. In John x. 6 the word is 'proverb.'

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at the very end of it. There was one clear reason **Hebrews** why none of these institutions could leave the worshipper satisfied—‘perfected,’ in the sense that his requirements were completely met, and ‘as concerning the conscience.’ They were not in the sphere of the conscience at all, but only, at the best, a discipline of the external life, ‘righteousnesses of the flesh,’ and in the same category with what accompanied them, distinctions of clean and unclean meats, prohibitions to some of drinks which were allowed to others, and washings which could never go below the surface. The purity they attained was only a ceremonial cleanness; but the cry of the soul is deeper. It says, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.’ **ix.**

By a paradox which defines at once the failure of law and its success, this cry is nowhere so audible, nor so passionate, as from the heart of the legal system. Law forces man to think of his relations with God: feeling its inadequacy, he realises that he has needs which must be dealt with, and also that the relief must come from God, for he can himself accomplish nothing. This is the true function of the law, to kindle desire and aspiration, despair of self, and an appeal to heaven. It is no small thing, for, in the world of a good God, real aspiration is the pledge of ultimate attainment. But in the Old Testament, as in the New, attainment is by a Gospel, by promise, and not by law.

These types were appointed for a limited purpose, and a limited time—until the period of reformation

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews ix. But the good things which it foreshadowed our Lord bestows.

¹¹ But Christ having come forth, the High Priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, ¹² Nor by means of the blood of goats and bulls, but by the efficacy of his own blood, He entered once for all into the Holy places, having obtained the eternal ransom. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the defiled, sanctify toward the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much rather shall the blood of the Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself spotless unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works unto the service of the living God?

Christ
contrasted
with These.

‘Christ having come forward.’ The idea is that of His standing forth in His official capacity, visibly acting as the high priest of a greater order (the order of Melchizedek), by virtue of His sacrifice on earth, and more especially of His entrance into the true shrine of God. He is high priest of those good things, which were still future, the satisfaction of those aspirations which the law at its best might kindle but could not slake.

Now what were the good things to come? The phrase occurs again in the assertion that the law had a shadow, but not the very image of these good things to come (x. 1). Well then, knowing what the Law foreshadowed, we know what Christ bestows. A veritable, sufficing and abiding expiation, relief for

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the burdens of the conscience, removal of all barriers between the soul and God, and access to the holiest by His blood,—of these good things the law had presentiments and hopes; and these Christ bestows upon His people. Hebrews ix.

He has passed through a more spacious and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, this material world. For this remarkable phrase many explanations have been offered. The fathers held that it was through the veil of His own flesh which concealed the deity within; and of which He said, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will rebuild it. Others have urged that the Church, which also was His Body and a temple, must at least be included in the thought. Dr Westcott very characteristically proposes to combine these views. And it is of course possible to urge that Christ, on His way to His priestly kingdom, passed in a sense through all the genuine manifestations of God to man. ‘Through the True Tabernacle.’

But it is not possible to say that He did this ‘through His own blood.’ It was certainly not through His death, nor by means of it, that ‘the Word became incarnate and tabernacled among us.’ The order of thought is the reverse.

But the antithesis to ‘a tabernacle made with hands’ is twice worked out for us in the New Testament. The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, as the prophet saith, ‘Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool, what house will ye build for Me?’ (Acts vii. 48; xvii. 24). ‘Through the heavens,’ as we presently read, He passed to His

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Hebrews ix. place above all heavens, to His seat at the right hand of God.

One is conscious of the enlargement of heart with which the writer turns from thinking of the tent with its curtains to that more spacious and more perfect tabernacle.

‘His own
Blood.’

There is another contrast more impressive still. The blood of bulls and goats was the talisman by virtue of which those priests might enter the typical shrine: it sanctified to the purifying of the flesh of those who were ceremonially defiled. So much is granted. By virtue of such blood, the ban of such unfitness was removed. But this effect could not be due to its own efficacy: to touch it, we should rather have supposed, was to touch death and to incur defilement. There must be some profound reality, of which this prescription was the shadow. This is the blood of Christ, no passive, unconscious or reluctant victim. By His own blood He entered once for all into the holy places, having obtained eternal redemption.

‘For us’
‘unto God.’

In these days, when the Atonement is made to stand for little more than the melting and attractive influence of the cross, it is most important to observe that scripture lays even more weight upon Christ’s work for us than its effect upon us. He enters Heaven for us by virtue of His blood; and the effect is parallel upon higher levels with that of the Hebrew sacrifices on the lower. ‘Redemption’ is what He has ‘obtained’ for us, and the verb, which is unique, implies that He obtained it by an effort; while the noun, which means ransom, is closely akin to that in the two

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great verses which tell us that He came 'to give **Hebrews** His life a ransom, in exchange for many,' and again, **ix.** that He 'gave Himself a ransom-in-exchange for many' (Matt. xx. 28; 1 Tim. ii. 6). It is to God, not to man, that He offered Himself without spot, by that eternal Spirit which dwelt in Him unquenchable, so that while He suffered as the sacrifice He could also act as the High Priest. The redemption bought at such a price is not only actually enduring, it is in essence imperishable and eternal, effectual for ever, needing no repetition, conveying immutable satisfaction to all faithful souls.

We must not close our eyes to the plain meaning of the sacrificial teaching of this great epistle. But this is a very different thing from being ready with a logical and exhaustive theory of the Atonement, and how it avails for sin. Logical and exhaustive theories upon this and kindred subjects have foundered one after another, through all the past centuries. They are human, and the fact only is divine—the fact, which is to our theories what the physical universe is to science. God, Who gave us the Christian religion and the universe, no more supplies us with logical and exhaustive theories in the one sphere than in the other. 'It is deeper than hell, what canst thou know?' Theories
Inadequate.

The touch of any dead thing was polluting. But 'From Dead Works.' if the blood of bulls and goats allowed the defiled to resume their ceremonial purity and minister in the tabernacle, how much more should the willing and sublime sacrifice of Christ avail in the nobler regions of the spiritual life, wherewith He dealt?

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Hebrews ix. There also is misgiving and the sense of guilt. Our conscience is polluted by the touch of death, 'dead works,' which are not only things profane and lawless, but also all heartless and loveless compliance with the form of law, like Ezekiel's army clothed with flesh and covered with skin, but no breath of life within them. Christ is our life. The love of Him is inspiration. The law of the spirit of life in Him sets us free from the law of sin and death.

Unto
Service.

And here one strong phrase cuts in sunder a fallacy which has beguiled some and perplexed many. If our release comes to us, apart from works, by the efficacy of that sacrifice long since completed, why should we work at all? Because it is the law of our new life, because we are alive and in the temple of a living God, Whose temple-service attracts us; because we are cleansed for this very purpose from the coldness and apathy of the dead and brought to readiness and desire to serve. Ritual cleansing was 'toward the purifying of the flesh': this reaches 'unto the temple-service of the living God.'

¹⁵ *And for this cause He is the Mediator of a new covenant (or testament), that, a death having taken place for the propitiation of the transgressions under the first covenant (or testament), those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.* ¹⁶ *For where a testament (or covenant) is, there is necessity that the death be implied of him who made it.* ¹⁷ *For, a testament (or covenant) is*

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binding as regards the dead, seeing that it never hath force while he that made it liveth. Hebrews ix.

These verses contain one of the most difficult problems of New Testament interpretation, the doubt arising from the following considerations.

The same word (*diathéke*) stands for covenant and testament: it has the latter meaning almost always in classical Greek; but never in the Greek Old Testament, nor in the New Testament unless it be here. Testament or Covenant.

The word 'testament' gives a meaning in the sixteenth and seventeenth verses which is, at least for modern readers, by far the more natural and simple. We at once agree that a will has no effect until the testator dies; but how can this be affirmed of a covenant? Death.

But when we look more closely into the passage, we discover that this easy rendering only shifts the difficulty further back.

For, in the fifteenth verse, it is certain that the first of the two transactions which are contrasted was not a bequest but a covenant. So therefore is the second also.

From this we go straight on to read that not one sort of *diathéke*, but all, involve the notion of death. Surely then the two sorts which are under discussion must be included. And thus we are brought back to the assertion, strange as it seems to us, that a covenant involves a death.

We have the choice of two explanations, almost equally difficult.

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Hebrews
ix.

One is that the meaning throughout is 'covenant, and that the sacrifices with which every serious covenant was accompanied did represent the death of the contracting party, who virtually said, when the agreement was ratified and the victim slain: 'In respect of this transaction my living volition and free choice are gone: I am in this matter as powerless to retract as are the dead.' This is the explanation of Bishop Westcott. But it must be confessed not only that it is somewhat strained, but that such symbolism suggests no sufficient reason for deducing the actual and literal death of our Lord in person.

The other is that at the end of the fifteenth verse, when an 'inheritance' was mentioned, this word turned the thought into the direction of a bequest, a testament, and through the remainder of the sentence this meaning for the word displaced the former one. Thus Bishop Lightfoot says, 'Even in the exceptional case (Heb. ix. 15-17), the sacred writer starts from the sense of a "covenant" and glides into that of a "testament," to which he is led by two points of analogy, (1) the *inheritance* conferred by the covenant, and (2) the *death* of the person making it' (Gal. iii. 16).

However obscure may be the argument, the lesson for our conscience is unequivocal. The covenant of works has been violated, and its penalties are incurred. But a propitiation has been made. A death has taken place for the offences that were under the former covenant. And now the new covenant is ushered in, with a solemnity which the introduction of the first did but foreshadow.

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¹⁸ *Wherefore neither has the first covenant been* Hebrews *inaugurated without blood,* ¹⁹ *for when every com-* ix. *mandment had been spoken according to the law by Moses to all the people, taking the blood of the calves and of the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, he sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,* ²⁰ *saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God hath commanded in regard to you ;* ²¹ *and the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the service with blood in like manner he sprinkled ;* ²² *and it is almost true that in blood all things are cleansed according to the law, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.*

When the old covenant was ratified, the people and the whole apparatus of worship were cleansed with sacrificial blood. This meant to say, Begin fresh and clean: do not carry into the covenanted relationships any stain of the old life: should evil memories disquiet you, reflect that between them and you there is the sprinkling of atoning blood, 'the blood of the covenant.' In fact the inspired writer carries this principle even further than the Old Testament has recorded. At the ratification of the covenant he says that Moses sprinkled the book of the law, as it then existed, which was Exodus xx.-xxiv. Later, when the tabernacle was erected, the Epistle tells us that both it and all the apparatus of worship were thus purified. Now in Exodus (xl. 9) we only read that these should be anointed with oil. But on searching deeper we find that the additional statement is due neither to accident nor mere assump-

The Blood
of the
Covenant.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews ix. tion ; for everything else that was anointed was also purified with blood, not only Aaron and his sons, but also their robes (which were actually a part of the apparatus in question), and it is natural to assume that this rule was applied consistently. Accordingly, Josephus makes the same assertion as our text.

Cleansing and Release. From all this, there is inferred a double function of sacrifice. Almost all things are *cleansed* with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission, no *release*. It washes us from sinful stain and foulness ; and again it breaks the chain of evil habit and long entanglement. Thus in the Apocalypse, we read that He 'loved us and *loosed* us from our sins, by His blood,' and again that the saints have '*washed* their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. i. 6, vii. 14, R.V.).

But it is more surprising that not only guilty men require purification, but also that which represents the heavenly places.

²³ *It was necessary therefore that the patterns of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.* ²⁴ *For not into holy places made with hands Christ entered, the antitypes of the true, but into the heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.* ²⁵ *Nor yet, with the purpose that He should many times offer Himself, as the high priest enters the holy places yearly with alien blood,* ²⁶ *for then it were needful for Him to have suffered many times, from the foundation of the world ; but now, once for all, at the fulfilment of*

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the ages, hath He appeared for the remission of sins through the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷ *And forasmuch* **Hebrews ix.**
as it is appointed unto men once for all to die, and after that judgment, ²⁸ *so also the Christ, having been offered once for all to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, unto those who wait for Him, unto salvation.*

We have now to ask what is meant by the purifying of the heavenly things. Great commentators like Bengel have been content to evade this problem by supposing that the purification which man requires in order to enter heaven, is in a figure of speech transferred to the heaven he enters. Nothing could be less suitable. The purification of man has been discussed already ; and here the subject is 'heaven itself' and the 'heavenly things themselves.'

We turn then, for an answer, to the earthly copy, and ask why this needed to be purified. It is because of its association with man the sinful. Human guilt had stained it, and its purification was a part of the process of our cleansing. It is our influence which has reached to it.

Now there are many indications in Scripture that the influence of man, and of the saving work of His Redeemer, extends much farther than we commonly suppose. The moral 'solidarity' of creation is like the physical reach of gravitation. **Earth and Heaven.**

It is not only that what has passed on earth is a lesson for all to learn, that the manifold wisdom of God is made known by the Church to the principal-

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Hebrews ix. ties and powers of heaven, that the angels desire to look into the things we know, or that the mystery of godliness in Christ was 'seen of angels' (Eph. iii. 10; 1 Pet. i. 12; 1 Tim. iii. 16). It is more to the point in question that 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for the redemption,' and that God has through Christ 'reconciled all things unto Himself, having made peace by the blood of His cross, by Him, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth' (Rom. viii. 22; Coloss. i. 20). This last is a remarkable phrase indeed. It must imply at the very least, as consequent perhaps on the fall of angels and of men, a certain estrangement, a dissension extending through the universe, a need of peace and reconciliation which reconciliation St Paul, as directly as this epistle, attributes to the blood of Christ. So much is revealed, that we may know how great, how far reaching is the salvation which we share. But it is left in shadowy grandeur, because the Scriptures are not planned to gratify our curiosity, but to make us wise unto our own salvation. Enough for our purpose, however, is put beyond question. If all things in heaven were reconciled by His blood, we are no longer surprised to learn that all things are also purified.

One
Offering.

He has done this by an atonement which stands alone and unrepeatd. If its efficacy were spent, He should either cease to exercise in heaven the priestly office, of which the fountains would have run dry, or else He should repeat the sacrifice, should indeed already have repeated it many times

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since the foundation of the world. But His one Hebrews sacrifice has been efficacious from the first, He is ^{ix.}

‘the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.’

Therefore His appearance in history was not hurried : ^{Late in Time.}

at the completing of the ages (St Paul’s ‘fullness of times’) He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. The delay was good. Man would not have felt his impotence, nor known the value of his redemption, if Christ had come before Hebrew law and Greek culture and Roman discipline had essayed the task in vain.

Now what is the consummation of this great work, His Return. what is the destiny of the Christ ?

The doom of common men is to die, and after this—the next stage in the inspired conception—cometh judgment. For good or ill we must all stand before the judgment seat of God.

He also died once ; but His death was a sublime achievement : He was offered once for all to bear the sins of many. He ‘bore’ them in the very sense in which sinners must bear their iniquity ; and the assertion is quoted from the greatest of Messianic prophecies (Isa. liii. 6). He endured the penalty for us. What a contrast with vulgar death !

But instead of awaiting judgment, His second appearance will be His return with salvation to His exultant people who expect Him. It will be ‘apart from sin,’ which once He took upon Himself, but with which He no longer needs to deal.

In Ezekiel, Jehovah Himself separates His flock. In the Gospel Jesus will do this (Ezek. xxxiv. 17 ;

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Hebrews ix. Matt. xxv. 32). Instead of taking part in the judgment, however triumphant His part might be, He is Himself the Judge. Now it is the same profoundly significant contrast which inspires these words.

HEBREWS X

1. For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

5. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me :

6. In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

7. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God.

8. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt-offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein ; which are offered by the law ;

9. Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

10. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins :

12. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God :

13. From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

14. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

15. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us : for after that he had said before,

16. This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them ;

17. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

18. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

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19. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20. By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh ;

21. And having an high priest over the house of God :

22. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

23. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering ; (for he is faithful that promised ;))

24. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works :

25. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is ; but exhorting one another : and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

26. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.

27. But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

28. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses :

29. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace ?

30. For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, the Lord shall judge his people.

31. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32. But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great flight of afflictions ;

33. Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions ; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

34. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

35. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

36. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

37. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

38. Now the just shall live by faith : but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

39. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition ; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

X

THEIR SACRIFICE AND OURS

¹ *For the law having a shadow of coming good* Hebrews *things, not the very image of the realities, can never, x.*
by those sacrifices year by year which they offer
continually, make perfect them that draw near.
² *For then would they not have ceased to be offered?*
because the worshippers, cleansed once for all, should
have had no more conscience of sins. ³ *But in these*
offerings is a remembrance of sins every year. ⁴ *For*
it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to
take away sins.

In this chapter the main argument is to some extent recapitulated; and it is closed. But this restatement lays much more stress upon the individual experience, for this also is an evidence. What do men actually find in the law? What does it impress, or fail to impress, upon the sinner looking for relief? Recapitulation.
Experience.

It could never, we read, completely reassure him; because it was not real, nor even the 'image' of the reality (which, according to St Chrysostom, means a picture painted in colours) but only a shadow. It was made after the pattern shown to Moses in the mount, and this itself was only an

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Hebrews image of the reality; so that the law was two
x. removes away from what it represented.

Law Unpro- The sacrifices were offered year by year continually,
gressive. a weary and monotonous repetition, not only without achievement of the object, but even without progress towards it, each year exactly like the last. Sin was never removed by them at all, 'or else,' he asks, and this deserves our best attention, 'would they not have ceased to be offered?' But does this follow? May there not be new sins to require the new expiation? What is the meaning of telling us that the worshipper once cleansed should have no more conscience of sin, us, who daily repeat the prayer 'forgive us our trespasses'? Have we no more conscience of sin? If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves. How then can we rebuke the law for remembering it year by year?

Sin an
Unbroken
Force.

But the writer has in mind something entirely different, not the existence of sin but its predominance, the menaces of a force unbroken and formidable, against which the struggle needs to be renewed again and again, from the beginning, as if nothing had been accomplished hitherto. If, he says, an effective remedy had been discovered, it would remain permanently effective, one offering for sin for ever. But what kind of remedy is this, which leaves us, after cycles of treatment, exactly where we were when we began?

But for us
Broken.

The Christian knows that what has been won for him is no mere skirmish, but a battle which decides the campaign. When he confesses his sin, there is no question of a new atonement for this sad new

Their Sacrifice and Ours

experience; the one effective and sufficient offering Hebrews continues; the covenant is so far from being cancelled x. that God is faithful and just (as well as merciful) to forgive him. He is a prodigal received back, and no future sense of blame will renew the former friendless exile. He is not at enmity with God. Appeasement is not what his soul cries out for, even when the remembrance of his sins is grievous unto him; for he knows that God his Father, though He be offended, loves him. What a difference between filial penitence and the incessant slaughter of victims, and blood for ever fresh upon the temple stones, such blood of unconsenting victims as could never take away sin, much less sanctify for ever. Its ethical province was wholly different, to prevent the conscience from growing careless, to make fresh the remembrance of sin again every year.

This remarkable word, 'remembrance,' is found again in the Greek Testament only in the narratives of the Lord's Supper (Luke xxii. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 24, 25). Their sacrifices were only 'a remembrance of sin,' not of any sin-bearer: we 'do this in remembrance of' our Redeemer and His all prevalent sacrifice. Is it too much to say that the contrast expresses all the difference between the Old Covenant and the New?

Another word also deserves attention. By no accident is the same verb 'to draw near' used twice, in the first verse and in the twenty-second: first, of the sacrifices which could never make perfect them that draw near; and again of our privilege, who may draw near to the most holy place (whence they were, even in type, excluded) by the blood of Christ, in full

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Hebrews assurance of faith with hearts that are cleansed from
x. an evil conscience.

⁵ Wherefore coming into the world He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou didest not desire: a body didst Thou prepare for Me. ⁶ In whole burnt-offering and sacrifice for sin Thou hadst no pleasure. ⁷ Then said I, Lo, I am come, in the roll of the book it is written of Me, to do, O God, Thy will. ⁸ Above, saying that sacrifice and whole burnt-offering and offering for sin Thou wouldest not, nor delightedst in, such as are offered according to the law; ⁹ then He said, Lo, I am come that I may do Thy will. He taketh away the first that He may establish the second. ¹⁰ In the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The Law
avows its
Failure.

Is Sacrifice
Superseded?

In these verses, the Law as a way of salvation or even as a permanent institution is further condemned, upon Old Testament authority. But the vitally important question arises, when we read that God has no pleasure in sacrifices, whether this declaration means to put aside the whole theory of vicarious suffering as worthless, or only the application of it in the sacrifices of the law. It is not a question to decide according to our views or theories: we have to examine the passage carefully and dispassionately, and to mould our theories on the result. When this is done there can be little doubt of the result. It is only and explicitly because the blood of bulls and goats fails to take away sins, that He says sacrifice and whole burnt-offering and offering for sin thou wouldest not. But if this is spoken with another

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‘sacrifice,’ another ‘offering’ full in view, of which Hebrews it is distinctly testified that these disabilities do not ^{x.} apply to it, and further that the removal of Jewish sacrifices is with the intention that this should take their place, then it is folly to pretend that all sacrifices, all offerings, are swept away together.

Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, He says, ^{The Body of Christ.} but a body Thou hast prepared for Me, and the verb is the same which lately described the preparing—the making and equipment—of the tabernacle (ix. 2). Plainly these two ideas are contrasted: He taketh away the first that He may establish the second. The question then is narrowed down to this, Was it (as many now teach) the body of Christ in a life of perfect general obedience, into which obedience we enter by the submission of our wills to God—was this the substitute for the sacrifices of the law; or was it the doing of the will of God in one specific and sacrificial act, was it His body offered as upon an altar, a body broken and blood poured out like wine?

It is hard to see how the most deliberate intention could be more explicit than this chapter in its reply. Instead of carefully avoiding sacrificial terms because sacrifice is the thing repudiated, it emphatically reproduces them. ‘Offering Thou wouldest not’—yes, but it is by an ‘offering’ that we are sanctified, ‘the offering of the body of Christ’ (ver. 10). This is the more remarkable and significant because the word rendered ‘offering’ is only once elsewhere applied to the sacrifice of Christ (Eph. v. 2). It is used here evidently to press the fact that other

Sacrificial
Terms.

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Hebrews 'offerings' being rejected, the 'offering' of Christ
x. avails. 'Sacrifice Thou wouldest not,' but He
'offered one sacrifice for sins for ever.' 'A body
hast Thou prepared for Me . . . I am come to
do Thy will': is this to save us by the obedience
of a life-time? The doing of God's will by the
which we are sanctified is the offering of the body
of Christ once for all (ver. 10). Once more; every
priest standeth . . . offering the same sacrifices,
but He, when He had offered one sacrifice, sat down
(ver. 12).

**The Opening
of his Ears.**

The Psalmist wrote, Mine ears hast Thou opened,
which is not translated but paraphrased in the
words, A body Thou hast prepared for Me. It is a
just and significant paraphrase from the point of
view of this epistle. The ears of Christ had never
been stopped by any obstruction or inattention
whatever; and the opening of them could only indicate
that point of time when He began in a new sense to
be obedient by taking upon Himself the form of a
servant. It is precisely when He cometh into the
world that He saith, Lo, I come to do Thy will—a
body hast Thou prepared for Me—Mine ears hast
thou opened to hear mandates and obey them.
Thenceforth, though He were Son yet learned He
obedience by the things which He suffered.

*¹¹ And every priest standeth daily ministering and
offering often the same sacrifices, which can never
take away sins; ¹² but He having offered one sacri-
fice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand
of God, ¹³ expecting thenceforth until His enemies*

Their Sacrifice and Ours

be made the footstool of His feet. ¹⁴ For by one Hebrews offering He hath perfected for ever them that are ^x. sanctified.

‘Every priest standeth’: to sit down within the shrine would be an inconceivable audacity; much more to sit down in the most holy place; and most of all, beside the glory, upon the mercy-seat itself. But even the psalmist in the Old Testament felt—though he cannot have understood—how different should be the case of the priest after the order of Melchizedek. The Priests Stood.

To Him Jehovah said, Sit Thou on My right hand, and sit as a king expecting political developments. Accordingly, there is no effort, no suspense, no persuasion of a reluctant will or an unsatisfied righteousness in the intercession of our High-priest. He sits as one Whose task is completed and His function successfully discharged. He sits, as being, in the solemn words of Zechariah, the man Who is Jehovah’s ‘fellow.’ Christ Sits.

The contrast between Him and other priests is the more impressive because, at the mention of them, the indictment of their failure is repeated, the monotonous and abortive effort, the sacrifices which are so ineffectual to remove sin, so futile if this had ever been their aim.

He, on the other hand, has but to await, in solemn confidence, the putting of the last enemy under His feet. His Expectation.

For He has, by one offering, for ever satisfied the requirements, ‘perfected’ the equipment, of every

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Hebrews one that is sanctified. These words give the note
x. for both the exhortation and the warning which are coming. How brave should we be, who have such an High-priest. How miserable if, with such grace bestowed on us, we are found among those enemies whose destruction He expects. But the progress of thought is once more arrested for a moment, to show that the conclusion reached is in exact accordance with the quotation already made from Jeremiah.

¹⁵ Also the Holy Ghost testifieth to us ; for after having said, ¹⁶ This is the covenant which I will establish with them after these days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws in their hearts, and on their understanding will I write them, ¹⁷ then saith He, And their sins and their transgressions will I remember no more (Jer. xxxi. 33). ¹⁸ Where there is remission of these there is no more offering for sin.

The
Quotation
Recalled.

The quotation is repeated (from the eighth chapter) for a very simple purpose: to remind us at this advanced stage of the argument that the goal we have now reached is the same to which a former process led us. A time was predicted when no memory of sin and transgression should cast a shadow between humanity and God. The word for 'transgression' is highly suitable in this connection, being literally 'violation of law.' Now when there is no consciousness of violated law, there can surely be no more offering for sin. But with the disappearance of sin-offerings, Judaism itself must disappear.

¹⁹ Having then, brethren, boldness adequate for entry into the holiest in the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a

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way which He hath inaugurated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope unwavering, for faithful is He who has promised.

From the long argument, now triumphantly concluded, the result is a practical one. We must have boldness equal to our high vocation, boldness ourselves to enter the shrine as priests of the royal order; for now humanity is called to be a kingdom and priests, and the veil which used to exclude us is no longer interposed. This epistle never bestows the title of a priest in the new order upon anyone except Christ Himself. The term is probably avoided lest any distinction like that of Hebrew priest and people should seem to exist in the Church of Christ. But in bidding us to traverse the shrine even to the throne of grace, our partnership with Christ in this office is very clearly implied. We are said to enter 'in' the blood of Jesus, not 'with' it as if we bore it thither, for as we approach, we come 'unto the blood of sprinkling' (xii. 24).

And because we are admitted by virtue of His human suffering and human triumph, therefore we read of 'the blood of Jesus,' the name which He received of mortals at His circumcision, which is always in this epistle used with a clear sense of His kinship and tenderness.

We our-
selves enter
the Shrine.

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Hebrews
x.

This Truth
is Pauline.

The doctrine that we share with Christ His presence before God, is deduced from His priesthood, that is to say, His representative character in heaven. It is highly instructive to compare the argument with St Paul's demonstration of the same truth from the headship of our Lord. The measure of the divine power toward us who believe is nothing less than the working of His mighty power in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand. He gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body. Therefore He has also raised up, along with Christ, us who were dead in sins; and has made us to sit along with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. i. 19-ii. 6). It is the same conclusion, derived from other premises.

A 'Living
Way.'

We enter by a new and living way. The way is said to be living, paradox though this may seem, because Christ Himself is the way; and the reference to Him is put beyond question when we learn that the word rendered 'new,' a word which is unknown elsewhere in Scripture, means 'newly-slain.' The christian enters heaven by a way which is at once newly slain and yet living.

Our thought goes back to His description of Himself as bread. Bread is a thing entirely inert and lifeless: when eaten it submits to the vital powers within us, and is by them assimilated to our flesh and blood. But, said Christ, I am living bread, which therefore assimilates instead of yielding to assimilation, and conveys a life otherwise unknown (John vi. 51, 53).

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A road also is a lifeless thing, passive under the Hebrews traveller's heel. But Christ is at once the way and \times . the life, and no man comes to the Father except by Him. He is 'newly slain' throughout the ages, but He is alive for evermore; at once our way and our support along the way.

This way He has Himself inaugurated. His days here were 'the days of His flesh' (v. 7), subject to the conditions of our mortal life: His flesh was as the veil in the temple, and severed Him awhile from His native heaven. He was the first Who passed by the rending of that veil into the holy places, inaugurating a way to God, unknown before. And now, through that torn veil we approach with a boldness which no other worshipper ever knew, the peace and joy of believing. Entering, we remember that He has gone before us, a mighty Priest over the whole house of God, alike over the inner and the outer shrine, that house in which Moses was faithful as a servant, but Christ as a Son over His Father's house. Therefore, while the Mosaic sacrifices could never make them perfect who 'draw near' through them (ver. 2) we 'draw near' in the full assurance of faith. Through the Veil.

At this point it well deserves attention that the same exhortation which led up to the long argument concerning the priesthood is now repeated at the close of it. Then we read 'let us hold fast our confession . . . let us come with boldness to the throne' (iv. 14, 16). In reversed order, these are exactly what we read again. What has passed in the interval has emphasised the claim of the Gospel on the conduct of the believer.

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Hebrews x. Our Hearts 'Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.' For if God remembers our sins and our iniquities no more, we too should let the evil past be past, upon whom the atoning blood has fallen, to assure us of our part in it.

And our Bodies. 'And our bodies washed with pure water.' For where the blood is, there must be water also: the blood for atonement, the water for cleansing and regeneration. It was only when thus prepared that the priests of the old system performed their service.

Hope. 'And let us hold fast'—as having and as prizing it —'the confession of our hope without wavering.' Hope—in the previous verse we had the full assurance of faith; and in the next is the provoking one another to love. Thus the christian triad is complete.

It is little realised what a fountain of hope is our religion. The supremacy of good, the pilgrimage of the soul to God, His love to us, and the approaching of His day;—such thoughts cry shame on pessimism.

Hope (as a noun) is not once mentioned in the Gospels, but when the Lord ascended, it became frequent; and more so in this than any other epistle except the much longer Epistle to the Romans. And our hope is rooted in the very character of the Eternal: He is faithful Who promised.

²⁴ And let us consider each other to provoke unto love and unto good works: ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.

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Thus brought nigh to a common centre, and sharing Hebrews a common privilege, we are reminded of our duty to ^{x.} the Church, and bidden to consider one another. ^{Consideration.} There is a charm, even to the natural heart, in a man who can think of other burdens and capacities, other hopes and fears besides his own, a considerate man. To observe what hinders my brother, what opportunity he would embrace and improve if it were given him, to direct toward him something of that sympathetic vigilance which I do not fail to bestow upon my own interests, this is a high Christian attainment and a fine grace. And this qualifies us to provoke one another to love and to good works, for such incitement requires to be given with circumspection and tenderness.

The phrase, too, is worth observing. 'Provocation' in the Greek as in the English has the meaning ^{'To Provoke.'} of a collapse of temper under a strain. Ours should be a strain of another sort, a saintly pressure, under which sullenness and evil temper would give way, and love and good works replace them. Perhaps also the verbal paradox of 'provoking unto love' was intended; as St Paul certainly intended the paradox (too sharp for the courage even of our Revisers) which says 'be ambitious to be quiet' (1 Thes. iv. 11).

'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, ^{Assembling Together.} as the manner of some is.' Fear of persecution, intellectual pride, difference of rank, many and various motives would keep some from their assemblies. But this absence is branded as desertion—by the same word wherewith God promises

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Hebrews x. 'I will never . . . forsake thee' (chap. xiii. 5). The principle of association is a mighty force which it is the duty of the church to utilise. How would it fare in a general election with a political party which relied solely upon the intellectual convictions acquired by its followers in the study? Demonstrations of numbers, the affirming of resolutions, the curious infection of enthusiasm, all play their part in the result; and men 'provoke each other' in the common cause. Party enthusiasms are fitful and local at the best: there is but one organisation which holds its demonstrations all the year round, which attracts both sexes and every age, which has studded the landscape of continents with its assembly halls. To throw away such a weapon would be madness; but everyone who forsakes the assembly blunts it.

We, on the contrary, are to care for each other and exhort each other, which will not happen if we are strangers.

'The Day.' And all this is the more urgent as they see 'the day' approaching. The day is the day of the Lord, and this expression is borrowed from the prophets, who applied it to every great day of judgment upon Israel or the Gentiles. In the New Testament, beyond doubt, it belongs to the Second Advent; but this also is beyond doubt, that every great and terrible day is regarded as a precursor and type of it; so that Jesus told Caiaphas he should from that time forward continually see the Son of Man coming in the clouds (Matt. xxvi. 64, R.V.).

Especially such was the day of the destruction of

Their Sacrifice and Ours

Jerusalem: it was, says one, 'a bloody and fiery Hebrews dawn of the great day'; and the signs of this, which ^{x.} Jesus had given, were already before their eyes warning them in their patience to win their souls (Luke xxi. 19). To the writer it was simply 'the day' standing out isolated and peerless; and the same unqualified and naked phrase occurs in two other places: 'Every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall reveal it:' 'ye are not in darkness that the day should overtake you as a thief' (1 Cor. iii. 13; 1 Thes. v. 4).

²⁶ For if we sin deliberately after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer is left a sacrifice for sin, ²⁷ but a certain dreadful expectation of judgment, and fervour of fire about to devour the adversaries. ²⁸ He who set at nought the law of Moses dieth without mercy on the word of two or three witnesses: ²⁹ of how much worse vengeance, think ye, shall he be deemed worthy, who has trampled on the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of Grace. ³⁰ For we know who said, Vengeance is My own I will repay; and again the Lord shall judge His people (Deut. xxxii. 35-36). ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

This tremendous warning, like that in the Sixth ^{The Fifth} Chapter, is against apostasy, as the description of ^{Warning.} the sinner plainly shows, and apostasy continued to the end. It asserts no impossibility of a return by penitence, even of the worst, to the one Sacrifice:

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Hebrews x. that question is not raised at all. But it declares of one who has not returned, who is in the act of sinning wilfully and rejecting the appointed sacrifice when judgment overtakes him, that there is left no other refuge in all the universe for him. Fearful is already the foreboding of his dark soul—dread of judgment and of a rage of fire to devour him—fearful also it is at last to fall into the hands of God. Death was the penalty of many a sin against the law; but this man has sinned against every manifestation of the Godhead: he has trampled on the Son; has made light of the blood of the covenant with the Father; and has insulted the Spirit—the tender Spirit of Grace. The law was avenged provided there were witnesses: the threat is more ominous and inevitable when God Himself assumes the office of Avenger.

No hands are gentler than His, into which to resign the spirit; nor was David mistaken when he said, Let me fall into the hands of God, for then he placed himself there; but to fall reluctant into those hands as a rebel who must be dealt with—this is the second death.

³² But call to remembrance the former days, in which, when first enlightened, ye endured much conflict of afflictions, ³³ partly, while ye were made an exhibition in reproaches and afflictions, partly as being partakers with those who fared thus. ³⁴ For ye sympathized with those in bonds; and ye took with joy the plunder of your goods, knowing that ye have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. ³⁵ Cast not away therefore your confidence which hath great recompense of reward.

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Again, as in the Sixth Chapter, fear is confronted by memory. They are to recall the afflictions which were a real conflict, a battle, but a battle won. Some troubles had fallen upon them ; some they had nobly taken upon themselves, but through all they had passed successfully. Sometimes, like culprits punished in the theatre to amuse the crowd, they were made a show of in reproaches and afflictions ; and when they were plundered they rejoiced, knowing that they retained, for themselves, a better possession, not to be wrenched away. At other times, when unassailed, they had boldly come forward as partners and sympathizers with those who suffered thus.

Hebrews

x.

The Help of
Memory.

Would they let such service go for nothing ; and forfeit, when they ought to be veterans, the reward they had earned as recruits ? Would they, who stood by their comrades in the dark hour, now forsake the assembling of themselves together ? Would they cast away the treasure within their hearts which once had more than consoled them for the spoiling of their goods ? This strong exhortation is reiterated just before the close of the Epistle (xiii. 3).

³⁶ It is patience ye need, that when ye have done the will of God ye may receive the promise. ³⁷ For yet a very little while and the Coming One shall come and shall not tarry. ³⁸ But My just man shall live by faith : and if he recoil My soul hath no pleasure in him. ³⁹ But we are not of the recoil unto destruction, but of faith unto the salvation of the soul.

In the Twelfth Chapter it is by patience that we run our race. And these had need of it, lest their

Patience.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews speed at the outset should fail to carry them forward
x. to the goal. For the will of God is one complete programme, to be executed throughout an obedient life; and the promise depends on this.

We ought to be patient, for He is coming. The promise was given to Habakkuk when sorely tried, and like these Hebrews in danger of impatience. 'How long,' he said, 'shall I cry and Thou wilt not hear? . . . wherefore holdest Thou Thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man who is more righteous than he?' Then he is bidden to be calm and patient. 'In Thee is continuance and we shall not die,' he hopes; and he is answered, 'The just shall live by his faith' (Hab. ii. 4). But if he recoil my soul hath no pleasure in him.

Faith.

And as before we read 'we are persuaded better things of you,' so now their character reassures him. We are not of those who draw back unto destruction, like Israel in the wilderness, but of faith to the saving of the soul.

Faith then was the condition of life with God, even in the invasion of the Chaldees. It now remains to establish a profound harmony between what has seemed discordant in the Old Testament and the New, by showing that faith has been the saving principle, everywhere and from the first. This is the theme of the next chapter.

HEBREWS XI

1. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2. For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

4. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts : and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

5. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death ; and was not found, because God had translated him : for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6. But without faith it is impossible to please him ; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

7. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house ; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

8. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed ; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

9. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise :

10. For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

11. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

12. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars in the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea-shore innumerable.

13. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

15. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly ; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God : for he hath prepared for them a city.

17. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.

18. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called ;

19. Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ; from whence also he received him in a figure.

20. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

21. By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the souls of Joseph ; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

22. By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel ; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

23. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child ; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

24. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter ;

25. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season :

26. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt : for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king : for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

28. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

29. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land : which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

30. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

31. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

32. And what shall I more say ? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae ; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets :

33. Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

34. Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

35. Women received their dead raised to life again : and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance ; that they might obtain a better resurrection :

Hebrews xi

36. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment :

37. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword : they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins ; being destitute, afflicted, tormented ;

38. (Of whom the world was not worthy :) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

39. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise :

40. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

XI

FAITH AND THE FAITHFUL

Hebrews xi. ¹ *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.*

What is Faith? Clearly this is a description of faith, not a definition. But even as such it requires some explanation. Perhaps it is the margin of the Revised Version which comes nearest to the meaning, and what we should understand is this:—

Faith is that which gives substance, body, reality, to our hopes, and which puts unseen things to the test.

Not Passive Certitude. There are many certitudes which we hold with a curious vagueness, because they do not concern us in any practical way. We are certain of the existence of a foreign city, while thinking of it much as a map indicates it, a round spot intersected by a crooked line. But if we are about to visit such a city, or if we have inherited property there, we straightway think of palaces and cathedrals reflected in rushing waters. Because mere assent has risen into interested expectation, therefore things hoped for have become substantial realities. And this is faith. By such faith Abraham looked for the city which hath the foundations. By such faith in the cross of Christ, coming,

Faith and the Faithful

it may be, far later than intellectual assent, we are released from the burden of our sins. Hebrews xi.

Again, faith is the putting invisible things to the test. Far short of certainty, faith is at work when we only consent as yet to 'come and see,' when the soul responds to that divine challenge, 'Prove me and see, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing' (Mal. iii. 10). Faith Tests.

If the love of God, and the pardon of sins, and the access to a Father in prayer are vague and theoretic assents rather than passionate beliefs to us—what then? Multitudes who wish it were otherwise with them, imagine that meantime there is nothing which they can do. But if these great realities are yet 'unseen,' if they have no such vividness of realisation as to stand out, substantiated for the inner eye, then as 'things unseen' let them at least be 'put to proof.'

Few indeed will assert that the spiritual world remains for them vague and misty, who have really prayed, really brought their sins to the cross, really cried out as to their Father. For in doing this is the germ of faith already. And it leads on from faith to faith.

² *For therein the elders had witness borne to them.*

³ *By faith we understand that the worlds (or ages) have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear.*

By faith the ancients attained their noble records. Rudimentary Faith.
Nay, it is by faith that we attribute to the word of

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews xi. God the cycles of the ages, so as not to ascribe what is around us to blind mutations of eternal matter.

There is at first sight very little connection between these verses. 'By faith the elders possess their honourable record . . . by faith we . . . by faith Abel.'

Faith in the Creator.

But the pronoun is not emphatic, as if *our* faith in particular were to be asserted. Rather we are to understand it thus:—By faith came all that was glorious in the past history of religion. For by faith we attain—we or any—to the certainty that God is in His world at all, that we have not been thrown up like bubbles in the ocean of eternal, uncontrolled mutation, that the visible world had its origin in a higher sphere, in the mind and purpose of a Creator. And by this belief every good man lived, from Abel to the Maccabees. To make head against persecution, against temptation, against 'the Time-Spirit,' we need to believe in a Spirit who presides over all times equally, whose word made the ages. The alternative is to believe in the mutations of eternal matter. And thank God, whatever difficulties science may have caused us, she has made it easier to-day than ever to believe in the spiritual origin of the universe, and its government.

This is the first and the elementary principle of faith. It was almost exactly expressed by Luther when he was told in menace 'the Pope will be against you, and the Church and the Emperor and the princes, and where will you take refuge?' and he answered 'Under the heaven of God.' So then,

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all is ours: the ages and their revolutions have been Hebrews framed by the word of God. And man shall live **xi.** by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Therefore in all really good actions, faith is pre-supposed. Although it is not mentioned in the Old Testament until we read that Abraham believed God, our Epistle is not therefore bound to begin with Abraham. It is inferred in the same spirit in which St James wrote that a man may show his faith by his works. To the controversial device of setting faith and works against each other, we can safely oppose this wonderful catalogue of good works, all cited to show the inspiring and fruitful effects of even the most rudimentary and simple faith.

There is perhaps another reason why this Epistle, The Old Testament has its Saints. proclaiming the abrogation of the ceremonial law, devotes a long passage to the glory of the ancient saints, the same reason why St Paul was careful to show that the founder of the Jewish nation and also its second king were justified by faith (Rom. iv. 1, 6). It is to show that the abolition of the temple services involves no disrespect to the ancient dispensation. There also were real saints, and their life was like ours, a life of faith.

⁴ By faith Abel offered unto God a more abundant (or genuine) sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne unto him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts; and through it he, being dead, yet speaketh.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews xi. Abel exhibits faith in worship; Enoch in a life of communion; Noah in rescue from destruction by the use of means, divinely revealed to him.

Abel. Abel, we are told, offered a 'more abundant' sacrifice than Cain. It was 'at the end of time' that the elder brother brought his laggard offering. He brought 'of the fruit of the ground'; but Abel brought 'of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of them.' Even on the surface of the narrative there is apparent more heartiness, a fuller consciousness of the claim of God to the best—more faith.

Is it fair to add that Cain's offering was lifeless, when such was also the 'meal-offering' of the Jews? The flesh of animals was not yet given to man for food: some deep sense of the penalty of sin, some faith, however dim, that God would accept a substitute, must have prompted Abel's offering of blood. It therefore penetrated deeper into the mystery of sacrifice than Cain's grudging tribute of the fruit of the ground. Cain brought only a thank-offering; and this, we read, would have been accepted if he had done well. As it was, he had not even felt his unworthiness to present homage without confession.

A Victim. It is suggestive that the long roll-call of triumphant faith, made strong out of weakness and turning armies to flight, should begin with the example not of a conqueror but a victim. By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice—and what then? Then he was murdered. If this life were everything, it is a disconcerting sequence. But, says the Epistle, this was not all. He fell, but passed not out of

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the mind of God, Who, in the silence of death, Hebrews heard the voice of his blood. By faith he survives: **xi.** he being dead yet speaketh. In these simple words, this evident yet profound deduction from the remarkable phrase in Genesis, it is asserted once for all, and at the outset, that while faith plays a splendid part in history, it is not by secular history that its true success can be measured, else, as Chrysostom says, 'He gave no reward to Abel.' Some 'quenched the violence of fire'—'others were tortured.' Faith has its rewards in time; but we are presently to learn of Abraham that its truest victory is won when it becomes indifferent to these, and looks for the city which hath the foundations. This is also our true desire, if we are followers of the faithful.

Nor let us overlook the fitness of this incident to remind the Hebrews (and us) of Another Whom also His brethren had struck down, Whose blood, it is added, speaketh better things than that of Abel.

⁵ By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, because God translated him: for before his translation he had this witness borne him, that he was well pleasing to God.

'He was translated—he was well pleasing.' Such **Enoch.** was already the Greek rendering of the Hebrew words 'He walked with God, . . . God took him.' In neither language is there any mention of his faith. It is quite likely that neither Enoch nor any patriarch ever heard of any such dogma as that of salvation by faith. But yet, as the blood circulates in the veins of men who are most unconscious of

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews xi. it, so the text asserts that they had faith and were saved by it. For, we read, none can come to God without believing that He exists, that He rewards those who seek Him out. And since this is faith, without faith it is impossible to please Him. In this argument it is implied without being written that no man can please God except by coming to Him. And this truth, silently assumed, well deserves attention. It means that God really loves man, and calls him, not as a slave to work on his plantation, but as a guest at his Son's wedding feast. It is most suitably affirmed of Enoch, who walked with God in close communion. But the verse implies it of us—every one.

Faith draws near.

The courage thus to approach God is faith, and it pleases Him. It has often been observed, and is probably true, that this is the smallest and most rudimentary faith to which Scripture anywhere assigns a result so great.

Shall we bid it suffice for us? Shall we cast aside all the revelation that has come since then, and be satisfied to please God by trusting that He exists, and will reward us when we seek Him? This is not the mind of an Epistle which has already warned us to go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation, in which foundation was included 'faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.'

We have a grander revelation. Every word of this appeals to faith, and our faith fails if we refuse it. How shall we escape if we refuse Him Who speaketh from heaven? But it is good to remember that less is required of them to whom less is given,

Faith and the Faithful

and faith which without blame is limited in extent **Hebrews**
may be pure and strong and acceptable. **xi.**

⁷ By faith Noah, warned concerning the things not seen as yet, moved with reverential awe, prepared an ark unto the saving of his house, by which he condemned the world, and became heir of that righteousness which is according to faith.

The faith of Noah dealt with an explicit revelation, and is the first which is said to have done so. **Noah.** Being warned, and moved thereupon with that same 'reverential awe' which this Epistle ascribes also to Christ Himself (v. 7), his faith showed itself by his work, and by this he condemned the world. For, as the huge structure took shape, it bore witness, to the sinners who mocked, that one, at all events, expected punishment to follow sin. In the judgment of Noah, very unmistakably, they were doomed. And his rescue (which was also his acquittal among those condemned) was the natural result—the inheritance—of a righteousness wholly due to faith. We too must remember that the only true faith is that which, if challenged, we can show to be real by our works, and especially by those actions which plainly declare to the ungodly that our hope is not their hope, nor our fear theirs.

⁸ By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go forth into a place which he was about to receive for an inheritance, and he went forth not knowing whither he went. ⁹ By faith he sojourned in the land of

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews xi. *promise as in a strange land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the joint-heirs of the same promise.*
¹⁰ *For he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose Architect and Master-builder God was.*

Abraham. With Abraham the story of faith opens a new chapter. He is the first whose faith is distinctly mentioned in the Old Testament—the father of the faithful. With him the line of the patriarchs begins, and henceforth there are definite promises to be trusted, and a family and linked succession of the faithful, who shall presently expand into a tribe, a nation, and even a Church. Accordingly the faith of Abraham is treated upon a large scale, in two sections divided by an interposed comment.

The Exile. By faith, in the simplest possible obedience to the will of God, he went forth into an unknown land. He was about to inherit it ; but even this he knew not, until, being there, he was bidden to lift up his eyes and believe that all he saw should some day be given him for an inheritance. Gift after gift was promised, ever calling on him to look forward—the land, wherein he was a stranger—an heir when he had no child—a nation, still farther in the distance. But his was the confidence which can be patient. It was no grief to him to wander as a nomad in the land of promise, and to see proud cities laugh at the tent where dwelt the claimant of them all.

His Co-heirs. Isaac, also, and Jacob (who was fifteen years old when Abraham died) were content with the same hope ; and there is applied to them an expression unique as between father and son : they are not the

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heirs of Abraham, but his co-heirs, receiving the Hebrews promise, like him, direct from heaven (Gen. xxvi. 3; xi. xxviii. 13). So it is written of us: we that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

The striking point is not that they waited; but ^{They} that they waited all their lives, and did not receive ^{received not} the promise. No person, not the most bitter antagonist of the faith, can state this paradox with more emphasis than Stephen did, who said, 'He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not enough to plant his foot upon, yet He promised to give it to him for an inheritance, and to his seed after him' (Acts vii. 5). To him, and also to his seed; but if only his seed received it, one-half the promise remained unfulfilled. With equal frankness it is here avowed that the three recipients of the promise died, not having received it. How shall we solve this entanglement? The answer is that not having received it they still 'died in faith': their true hope lay beyond the grave. And so Abraham was satisfied in his tent, because his heart and his insight were enlarged; he saw that the cities of the Philistines were too unstable to be the real gift of God, which must be greater than human desire, not less, or it would mock us; he looked for the one city which is well ^{The City of} founded and eternal, the city which hath the foundations, whose Deviser and Master Workman was Himself the very God of his hope. Less than this could not satisfy his ever-deepening aspiration. The letter of the promise fell away, like blossoms when the fruit is formed; it had no glory by reason of the new glory that excelled, the far-off splendour of the

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews xi. spiritual city, with the twelve foundations on which are graven the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. Well might Abraham, as he saw the day of Christ and was glad, understand that he saw it afar off, and perhaps dimly, and that he must wait for it. The fate of impatient overhaste was revealed to him in the ruin of Lot, as it is in the ruin of innumerable worldlings since.

Elementary
though
Strong.

It is sometimes objected that all this implies a spiritual development, much beyond the period of the patriarchs. On the contrary, it is all simple, and even elementary, as befits the time. To one who had come away, apparently from entangling influences, to walk with God, nothing was more natural than to expect that God would recognise the sacrifice, and repay a hundredfold more in this life. But even the simplest faith could not for ever expect the requital to be secular and earthly.

If their faith were strong, little of other attainment was needed to discern presently that God will not put off, with vain and fleeting gifts, the immortal cravings which He Himself inspires, but will give worthily if He gives at all. The vanity of mortal acquirement is sung in the most primitive poetry; and from this it is but a step for faith to understand that the promise of such reward can only symbolise some grander reality, a vaster city, houses not made with hands.

¹¹ *By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed, and that when she was past age, since she counted Him faithful Who had promised.* ¹² *Wherefore*

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also were born of one, and him as good as dead, as Hebrews many as the stars in heaven for multitude, and as ^{xi.} the sand that is by the sea-shore, which is innumerable.

Most notable in these verses is the boldness which **Even Sarah.** seems to say that faith was not only a condition of God's working, but also to some degree an active agent, as really as human labour is an instrument in giving us our daily bread. Because of Sarah's faith, therefore there sprang from her aged husband the countless children of Israel.

The promise had been long given, and its fulfilment had lingered long. At last its accomplishment would be miraculous; and then it was announced. That Sarah laughed was the natural expression of a mingled feeling, equally removed from stolid incredulity and firm assurance. Some faith there was; and our Epistle claims no more than this when it says 'Even Sarah'—'Sarah herself.' Her example is perhaps more encouraging to the feeble follower of Christ than the triumphant faith which never wavers at all. It tells us that we also may retain our hold upon the promises, even with a hand which trembles. **Though she laughed.**

¹³ These all died according to faith; not having received the promises but having seen them from afar, and saluted them, and confessed that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth. ¹⁴ For they who say such things make it manifest that they desire a fatherland. ¹⁵ And if they were mindful of that from whence they came out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they yearn

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews xi. *for a better, that is a heavenly land ; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for He prepared for them a city.*

These died
accordingly.

We knew what was meant, when we read of 'righteousness that is according to faith': it was faith which inspired and guided the actions, the character of that righteousness. And so we read that these all died, not 'by faith,' as if death was a task to be accomplished, but as faithful men die, unfearful, unreluctant, still, in the hour when other hope is fading, beholding their desire before them. For it was on faith they had still to depend: the promises, whether in the earlier or the later form, as the earthly or the celestial Holy Land, had not been attained.

Pilgrims.

But they saw the promises from afar (as John saw from an exceeding high mountain the New Jerusalem), and like one hailing with voice and gesture the vision of a distant joy, they saluted them and pressed forward, through the dark valley which lay between. This was the meaning of their avowal that they were strangers, and not only strangers who might in time cease to be such, but pilgrims who have no intention of becoming domiciled.

Abraham said this to the sons of Heth ; and Jacob spoke of his life as a pilgrimage and an unhappy one (Gen. xxiii. 4 ; xlvii. 9). Now a pilgrim is journeying somewhere. Such phrases imply that he is really going to a distant goal, seeking a fatherland. Yet it could not be for Ur of the Chaldees that these souls were restless ; the way back was con-

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stantly open to them (so the original suggests) if Hebrews
they had sought it. xi.

It was not this memory that haunted them. The dying Jacob, in no mood of baffled despair, but in his prophetic death-song of hope for his posterity, cried out for himself, as catching sight of the promise and saluting it, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord' (Gen. xlix. 18).

Thus they yearned for a heavenly fatherland. It is The Soul's
a beautiful conception of the future. In the father- Fatherland.
land our infancy was reared: there we knew our first friendships, our most radiant day dreams; there we learned what home is, the tranquillity, security, serenity, the strong influences which go down to the very bases of our being. And now a new life has been formed within us. Not from this world came the shelter of its infancy, nor its affections, nor its hopes. Out of the invisible was breathed the calm, the reliance, the sense of love, and the intimacy which make the home of the spirit that is in man. The native-place of these is the fatherland of the soul. And our life is a journey thither.

Because all men are destined for this higher life, therefore even the worldling speaks of the world with bitterness.

'This world is all a fleeting show for man's illusion given.'
'All green and wildly fresh without, all worn and gray beneath.'

If then the deep confession of all human hearts is that we are strangers in the world, who is really happy except the pilgrim, with loins girded, making his way home, seeing from afar, and already saluting,

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Hebrews xi. the golden dome that lifts itself above the mists of our mortality?

'Their God.' Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, and actually proclaimed Himself to Moses as 'the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob' (Exod. iii. 6). Because they are unworldly, have faith in the unseen, in a word, because they are His. Others may be 'given' to wine or money, 'devoted' to pleasure or ambition; but these belong to God, and He confesses them. Nay, He belongs to them: He is their God, and He proclaims it. The phrase 'He is not ashamed,' is that well-known resource of language which understates the case, in order that our mind, outrunning the letter, may apprehend more vividly the larger thought. That He 'is not ashamed' goes a small way toward expressing the condescending grace with which He Himself prepared for them a city.

Now what is here said of God and the patriarchs, is true also of Christ and His people. He will confess them before the Father and the angels. As God prepared a city for the patriarchs, He has gone to prepare a place for us.

This is the rest of God, into which the disobedient may not enter; but which He offers to us, saying, 'To-day, if ye will hear My voice, harden not your hearts.'

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had gladly received the promises was sacrificing his only begotten son, even ¹⁸ he, to whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called,

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¹⁹ *reckoning that God is able to raise one up even from Hebrews among the dead, whence also he received him in a figure.* xi.

Our thought is called back, from faithful death-
beds to the great event by which the faith of Abraham was deliberately tested. The test was suitable to his time, though quite impossible now. No inner impulse, no voice pealing in his ear, could persuade a Christian that God required of him a human sacrifice. But this is due, among other causes, to the voice which now called to Abraham, 'Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do anything unto him.' To us, who have learned of Christ, Abraham is not an example by virtue of his superior knowledge of the divine perfections, but by virtue of his devotion, as far as his knowledge went. The demand was not calculated for the twentieth century after Christ, but for more than twenty centuries before Him.

Granting his belief in the lawfulness of the act, which he was not allowed to consummate, the question was, did he love God enough to make the surrender to Him which, in another form, many fathers have made since then? Faith itself, through the promises which he had embraced (as we are reminded) so eagerly, cried out against the sacrifice. 'The things of God seemed to contend against the things of God, and faith clashed with faith, and demand with promise.' The strain upon his heart was equally severe upon his reason. But whereas in the Old Testament the former is more

Abraham's
Sacrifice.

Reason and
Heart were
Tried.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews xi. insisted upon, and we read of 'thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac' (Gen. xxii. 2), here we are told chiefly of the clash of his old conviction and his new duty, he that had gladly received the promises was offering his only begotten (which means, the only one in the line of the covenant, since it had been plainly said 'the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir';) even he, to whom it was said, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called.' But faith which the reason shakes the reason can help to re-establish. Abraham reckoned: he 'accounted' that God was able to raise one up again, even from among the dead.

'In a Figure.'

And according to his faith it was done unto him. Is this the meaning of the perplexing words 'From whence also he received him in a figure'? The knot may be cut: an easy and grammatical explanation can be had, by referring back to the assertion that Isaac was born from Abraham, when he was as good as dead. He had received him figuratively from the dead, at first, and this confirmed his calculation that God was able to restore him from the grave.

But this is a strange turn of thought, though it may be a grammatical rendering; and it may be doubted whether any unsophisticated reader ever found such an allusion in the text.

At the other extreme it is urged that since the surrender of Isaac by his father is clearly typical of the gift of Christ for man, therefore the release of Isaac from under the very shadow of the knife is a figure of the resurrection of the Lord. But it would be more natural, if such were the

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thought, to say that he was surrendered than that he Hebrews
was received back, in a figure.¹ xi.

The simplest explanation is the best. He did not really die, but in a figure he died, a substitute being provided for him. And therefore, in this figurative way of thinking, 'in a parable,' he was received back 'from among the dead' with whom he was reckoned for awhile.

The faith of Abraham is not said to have consisted in discerning analogies not yet revealed, but in readiness to surrender Isaac, assured that he could not be deprived of him for ever.

²⁰ *By faith, and concerning things to come, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau.* ²¹ *By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.* ²² *By faith Joseph, when near his end, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and commanded concerning his bones.*

In these three cases faith has still to do with the promise, and in the first two it reverses human order with regard to the inheritance. Isaac had sought to bestow it upon his elder son, but he recognised the overruling hand of God, and yielded the succession to the younger. This is important, for it is the first example of faith shown by the acceptance of disappointment, even though it was embittered by fraud and wrongdoing. Hitherto we have seen faith, in

Three
Death-Beds.
1. Isaac.

¹ The word is 'parable.' It occurs only in the Synoptic Gospels, and in this Epistle, here and in ix. 9.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews xi. spite of all hindrance and discouragement, clinging to God-given hopes. But Isaac, after striving hard to lessen the force of the prediction that the elder should serve the younger, had come to see the Hand that foiled him. Thereupon his submission was complete. He said, 'Yea, and he shall be blessed.' And on his deathbed, 'by faith and concerning things to come,' he declared their destinies.

Faith is not proved by baseless hopes, nor presumptuous enterprises, nor any forcing of the hand of Providence, but by recognising this. It was shown as truly by Barnabas yielding the foremost place to Paul, as by the Apostle of the Gentiles rising to his high vocation. Now it is often harder to give away, like Isaac, the supremacy from those we love than to surrender it ourselves. But this also, when the will of God is known, is faith.

2. Jacob. Jacob also, on his deathbed, showed his faith in the future as it was revealed to him, by giving two shares in the inheritance to Joseph; and by his firm adherence to his assertion that Ephraim, the younger, should have the foremost place. He blessed them, as old men do; but his blessing was not mere good will and prayer; it was specific, individualised, he blessed each of them.

The words, 'He worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff,' are curious for many reasons. They are not connected with the blessing of Joseph, but with Jacob's request in the previous chapter, that he should be buried in the sepulchre with his fathers (Gen. xlix. 14-21; xlviii. 28-31.) And thus they link his faith, clinging to the promised land,

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with the stronger faith, in the same connection, of Hebrews xi. Joseph, of which we are next to think.

Our English bibles read, 'Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.' In fact the same Hebrew consonants compose the two words 'rod' and 'bed'; and since the ancient manuscripts do not show the vowels, either translation is allowable. But within two verses the word is used again, and here it would be absurd to render it anything but 'bed' (xlix. 2). A foolish attempt has been made by some Roman controversialists to make capital by representing that Jacob worshipped before the rod of Joseph, which like a sceptre bore some emblem of his Egyptian dignities. But the text is explicit, it is upon his own rod that he leaned. Whichever rendering we adopt, whether we think of his feeble old age as raising itself upon a staff to worship, or as turning on his bed with his face to the pillow, it is in perfect harmony with the context. When Joseph gave him the promise he desired, we are told of the ancient form of oath to which he clung: and when Joseph returned to him the old man 'strengthened himself and sat upon the bed.'

This is its real interest, its sympathy with human weakness and decay, its truth to nature. This, which inspiration has preserved for us, appeals to our hearts after four thousand years.

By faith Joseph, to whom all the splendours of Egypt were subjected, clung to the promised land, predicted that his people should return thither, and took an oath of them that they should carry up his bones with them (Gen. l. 25, Exod. xiii. 19).

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Hebrews
xi.

Of all his fidelity to God and purity, of the faith which interpreted the dreams of others when his own were to all appearance cruelly refuted, this one fact, perhaps the most easy to overlook, is that which inspiration sets the highest, that no false lights misled him however dazzling, that he was true to the divinely given hope of his nation and claimed his share in this, and knowing that his bones would be laid 'under a star-y-pointing pyramid,' was careful that in due time his dust and that of his fathers should be mingled in the cave of Ephron.

²³ By faith Moses, when born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

Moses
hidden
because
Fair.

Here is a new type of faith; and it is well to observe closely what is said. By faith Moses was hidden: he was hidden because they saw that he was beautiful. Elsewhere the story is much the same. 'When she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.' 'Moses was born and was divinely fair, and was nourished three months in his father's house' (Exod. ii. 2; Acts vii. 20). It is as vain as it is foolish to deny that his beauty is pointed out as a strong incentive to the effort which is nevertheless ascribed to faith.

Now it is conceivable that in a race crushed almost to extinction, yet cherishing the most sublime hopes, an infant signally and rarely distinguished would become an object of special hope and effort. Faith in the destiny of an infant might be excited

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by his beauty—although it is a heavy weight to Hebrews suspend on such a cord. But surely it is a very ^{xi.} different appeal from that of ambition which sounds in the heart of a mother, as she looks upon her beautiful babe. Now in Exodus the act is especially hers: ‘when she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him.’ How could she give him up to die? How could God will it of her? He who implanted in her heart a mother’s yearning tenderness, could He desire this monstrous betrayal? She would not believe this: she did God’s will in refusing to surrender him: her love kindled her faith: she hid her beautiful baby.

In yielding to our best impulses, our highest intuitions, in refusing to harden our hearts, in feeling as well as calculating, we too obey the voice of God within us, we live by faith. The Voice Within.

But has not human nature, in the chosen family, risen and grown softer, since God could try Abraham (and Abraham could think God meant it of him) by demanding the sacrifice of his son. We accept the first narrative as frankly as the second; but human nature in the second stands on a higher plane.

²⁴ *By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called son of Pharaoh’s daughter; ²⁵ choosing rather to be partner in affliction with the people of God than to have the enjoyment of sin for a season; ²⁶ esteeming greater riches than the treasure of Egypt the reproach of Christ, for he looked to the recompense of reward. ²⁷ By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing the Invisible One.*

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Hebrews

xi.

A Great
Refusal.

The faith of the saints shows itself in all possible variety of circumstances, sometimes quenching the violence of fire, and sometimes not accepting deliverance from torture. By the same faith, Abraham claimed Canaan for an inheritance, and Moses refused the riches of Egypt. Perhaps it is due to the intervening generations of experience rather than to individual superiority, that whereas the one failure of Abraham's faith was in alien Egypt and from dread of the Pharaoh, it was there and in defiance of the king that the faith of Moses was most triumphant. In what crisis he made his great refusal, and in what form the rank was proffered which he refused, we know not. Inspiration has nothing to say to the vaunting legends of Philo and Josephus. It is enough that, as the Old Testament clearly implies, he formally chose his side. To remain neutral may have been impossible; but in any case, pleasures bought by the ignoring of his own people would have been pleasures of sin, because these were the people of God. 'I have seen the affliction of My people' were the words with which he was commissioned (Exod. iii. 7), and not to be with Him was to be against Him. Therefore Moses became a partner in those afflictions, the first exemplar of that strenuous faith which deliberately chooses to suffer with the oppressed, the leader of all, even the lowliest, who suffer loss or reproach for the truth, and especially of those who suffer in sustaining others. To this grace the first readers of this Epistle were urgently exhorted. 'Remember the prisoners as fellow prisoners,' and they are reminded

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of the time when they 'suffered along with those Hebrews in bonds' (xiii. 4, x. 34). The reproach which Moses xi.
thus accepted was the very reproach of Christ, The
because the whole Church, before the Incarnation Reproach of
as well as since, is in corporate union with Him. Christ.
In all their afflictions He was afflicted. By faith
therefore Moses felt that God was interested and
would defend him; and he, who feared greatly as
he fled into Midian, was not afraid of the wrath of
the tyrant when he finally forsook Egypt. The
time was coming when he should see God face to
face (Ex. xxxiii. 11), and already the frown of
man had no terrors for him, because he was As seeing
conscious of a more awful Presence, because his Him.
faith was, all along, an actual perception of the
Invisible One.

We also know that He is near us: how comes it, if such knowledge does not control or inspire or strengthen us? Or do we know it? Is not this perhaps the deepest need of the Church to-day, a keener sense, rising to spiritual perception, of the eye of God upon our actions, upon the gifts we yield to Him or retain, upon the service we render or refuse, upon the kindness which we show to our fellows, or withhold?

In all this, his faith was far from the Stoicism which professes to be indifferent whether it wins or loses, and to find prosperity and adversity much the same. As we saw that the faith of Abraham, in the act The Recom-
of sacrificing Isaac, was convinced that he should pense.
receive him back, even from the dead; so Moses did
not think that all was lost: he had respect unto the

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Hebrews xi. recompense of the reward. Stoicism is indeed the refuge of great souls, ignorant of the future and willing at all costs to do the right. But it will never greatly move or strengthen the masses of mankind. And it is the glory of revealed religion that it reconciles the requirements which God makes upon our devotion with our consciousness that we are made for happiness. To the sternest demands, it joins the highest hopes. To the eye of the martyr Stephen it reveals the Son of Man at the right hand of the Father. In the dawn and earliest spring time of the faith, men looked for the city that hath the foundations : they had respect unto the recompense of the reward : they saw and hailed the promises afar off. How indeed should they do bravely under the eyes of a Divine Commander and look for no reward ? We also may strengthen our hearts by the promises sent for all the Churches, and all that have an ear to hear, of what God shall give to him that overcometh.

²⁸ By faith he kept the passover and the sprinkling of the blood, lest he who destroyed the first-born should touch them. ²⁹ By faith they passed through the Red Sea as through dry land, of which the Egyptians making the attempt were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed round seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, when she had received the spies with peace.

National
Faith.

We are now to see a whole nation guided by the same faith which has hitherto illumined individuals ;

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and beyond doubt it is with intention that the writer **Hebrews xi.** passes to his new theme in such a manner as to exhibit the influence—the faith-inspiring influence—of a great soul upon a multitude. On our way to learn how ‘they’ crossed the sea, we read that ‘he’ kept the passover, and the sprinkling of the blood. The people who did this obeyed him: his belief in the danger and the expedient swayed and saved them all.

It is idle to suppose that they realised all that we believe of the profound meaning of sacrifice—were not sacrifices instituted in order to raise men gradually to these beliefs?—but they must have learned their own sinfulness, and the danger which sinfulness implies. For their sake nine plagues had befallen Egypt: their emancipation was demanded by God because they were His own (‘let My people go’): a sense of superiority and of divine favour could not but stir within them, with tendencies dangerous enough; but when the most tremendous blow was imminent, they were sobered by learning that it was imminent over their children also; that their exemption was no matter of course, but demanded the passover and the sprinkling of the blood; and without these they were in the same condemnation with their foes. No theory of the scriptural doctrine of sacrifice is tenable which glosses over this primary example, and what it must have meant to the Hebrews in the midnight of the Exodus. For this is the first example put forward of the faith which deals with penalty, the faith of sinners as such.

The Faith
of the
Sinful.

And now the faith of the whole nation is re-

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Hebrews xi. cognised: 'by faith they crossed the Red Sea.' This act was perhaps the beginning of their genuine national existence: they were baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. And this they attained by faith. With their exploit is sharply contrasted the failure of the Egyptians, who showed equal courage. But not all confidence is faith. There was only presumption when the vagabond Jewish exorcists took on themselves to invoke the name of Jesus. It was lack of faith in the divine championship of Israel which led the foe to pursue him into the deep. And the same action which emancipated those whom God led thither, overwhelmed those who essayed it without a warrant. And let us remember that, entirely apart from any such hostile motives, not every man is commissioned to do great acts, which is no doubt the meaning of the memorable words 'to another [the gift of] faith' (1 Cor. xii. 9).

Presumption
is not Faith.

Joshua.

Again, after many years and many lapses, the nation which had left Egypt by faith, entered by faith the Holy Land. At the Exodus they triumphed over nature; and now by the same power, over their human foes, after seven days of weary marching, seemingly ineffective, and of mockery and defiance from the stronghold. The lesson from the fall of Jericho is that of steady perseverance, when well assured of the will of God, in a course which may seem hopeless and irrational, in prayer for physical necessities, in gentleness when nature cries for vengeance, in the sacrifice of self, in resistance to the opinion of the public. Perhaps Joshua himself was discouraged and baffled at the end of the sixth

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day in which with wearying effort, not a blow had Hebrews been struck, not a stone loosened. And yet his ^{xi.} triumph was at hand, because 'no word of God can be devoid of power.'

At the same time was exhibited the faith of a Rahab. sinful and pagan woman, a progenitress of our Lord. By faith Rahab perished not when she had sent away the spies with peace. Hers was an ignorant faith, and a mixed and selfish motive. But at least she was aware of the supremacy of spiritual forces ; she dared much to conciliate them ; and this was accepted in the absence of opportunity for more. This unhappy woman is the first gentile convert here recognised, since the line was drawn which severed the Gentile from the Jew.

³² *And what do I say more, for the time will fail me as I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,* ³³ *Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,* ³⁴ *quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness became strong, became mighty in war, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.*

A great cycle in religious history closes with the The Judges. settlement of the Jews in Canaan. And with it closes the detailed historical survey of the heroes of faith and their fidelities. A roll-call of great names follows, and much ingenuity has been expended upon the order of their enumeration, which is in reality simple enough, being the historical order as regards

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Hebrews xi. each couple, but in every couple placing the later first, apparently with no deeper object than to avoid at once the monotony of naming each in its anticipated place, and the worse monotony of mere confusion. The finished and calculated style of this epistle is quite capable of such a refinement.

The
Prophets.

With these the prophets are mentioned ; and hereupon the tone of the narrative begins to change. Excepting Abel only, we have hitherto seen faith triumphant. But which of the prophets did not the fathers persecute ? And therefore, while we are still told of victorious effort, we read more of escapes from peril, from lions and fire and the edge of the sword, in which faith had its work as truly as in the rout of the armies of the alien. For indeed, if shining success were the invariable reward of virtue, there would be no temptation to sin, and perhaps no strenuous and vigorous virtue at all.

³⁵ Women received their dead from a resurrection ; but others were tortured, not accepting the deliverance [which they could have had], that they might obtain a better resurrection ; ³⁶ others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments ; ³⁷ they were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, slain with the sword ; they wandered in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, in evil case ; ³⁸ of whom the world was unworthy, roaming in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth.

The
Martyrs.

In this long and rapid survey, every form of suffering passes before us, and faith is sufficient for

Faith and the Faithful

them all. In some cases it was as if the resur- **Hebrews**
rection was anticipated ;—for we read that the **xi.**
dead were received 'from' it—and this made it
the harder that others must refuse deliverance.
But they looked forward, and knew that their crown
hereafter would be the brighter for every tear they
shed. It is to be noticed with what a fine sympathy
the writer counts the sorrows of the soul as equal
to the torments of the flesh, 'the deliverance' which
they might not accept, 'mockings' which he couples
with scourgings, and 'temptations' which he places
between the dreadful death of Isaiah (as tradition
asserts) and being 'slain by the murder of the sword.'
This great writer crowns his catalogue of sorrows, not
with some outrageous torture, but with the hunted **The Hunted.**
and friendless life of the outlaw, a long effort,
protracted privation and need. The whole world
was not a heritage worthy of them, but all they
had was the naked hillside or a den, a cave. All
this they endured by faith, as real as the faith
which set Joseph at the head of Egypt and promised
Palestine to Abraham. So vain it is to force all
religious experience into one mould ; so foolish to
suppose that if we belong to God, His treatment of
us will be such as we have read of, in other cases.
The task He now sets us is not the task of yesterday,
neither are we the same men. Because they dis-
charged a certain function, therefore the same faith
would not be shown in our performing it, just as
the enterprise of a Columbus is not shown by the
captain of an Atlantic liner.

³⁹ *And these all, having been well reported of*

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Hebrews xi. *through their faith, received not the promise, ⁴⁰ God having foreseen concerning us some better thing, that not apart from us they should be perfected.*

Not without us.

All the shining record of their great lives and deaths was due to faith. And we too, with temptations less cruel but perhaps more subtle, and a vocation which, after so many ages, we can still discharge only in the faith of Christ, we are part of the same family, nay the same mystical Body of the Lord. And as it is written that when one member rejoices all the members rejoice with it, so we read that the consummate bliss of each of the redeemed awaits the hour when it shall be the common bliss of all.

Two apparent contrarieties, which are no more than verbal — contradictions and only that — are worth noticing.

‘Received Promises.’

We read in this chapter of some who ‘received promises’ (ver. 33). And of Abraham it was already said that ‘when he had patiently endured, he received the promise’ (vi. 15). But they ‘received not’ the supreme promise, the ultimate blessing, in which body and soul shall be reunited, and the flesh which once hindered us shall become the agent of all that is most holy, a spiritual body; this they still expect, this they ‘shall not prevent us in receiving.

‘Made Perfect.’

So again, we are told that they without us ‘are not made perfect,’ and yet we read presently that we are come unto ‘the spirits of just men made perfect’ (xii. 23). But the second of these texts is

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not concerned at all with the measure of their Hebrews felicity, but with the completion of their discipline : xi. they watch us run : they, for their part, have finished their course. And as the same word is used of a full grown man, in contrast with a child (1 Cor. xiv. 20) so they are perfect in their course, while yet they wait the perfection of their glory. In yet another sense, He hath perfected for ever all them that are sanctified (x. 14).

We know with what moral the great Apostle would close an argument like this. He would say, 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'

HEBREWS XII

1. Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith ; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

4. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

5. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him :

6. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not ?

8. But if ye be without chastisement, wherefore all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

9. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence : shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live ?

10. For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure ; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

11. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

12. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees ;

13. And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way ; but let it rather be healed.

14. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord :

15. Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God ; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled ;

16. Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

Hebrews xii

17. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected : for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

18. For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

19. And the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of words : which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more :

20. (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart :

21. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake :))

22. But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

23. To the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

24. And to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

25. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven :

26. Whose voice then shook the earth : but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

27. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

28. Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear :

29. For our God is a consuming fire.

XII

A SUBLIME WARNING

Hebrews
xii.

¹ Wherefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses encompassing us, lay aside every weight, and sin the easily besetting, and let us run by patience the race set before us, ² looking unto the Captain and Perfecter of the faith, even Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who hath endured such contrariety of sinners against themselves, lest ye grow weary, fainting in your souls.

A Race.

All those heroes of the faith, having prevailed, now encompass us, who are called in turn to a race, and even to a conflict unto blood. In their multitude, and perhaps in the mystery which evades our senses, they are a cloud. And they are witnesses, in the double sense of spectators and attestors; 'witnesses' because they watch us, and because (like former combatants who animate with gesture and voice their successors in the arena) they bear witness to the glorious issues of the struggle.

The
Training.

To emulate them we must lay aside all that would weigh us down, the inert matter of which a gymnast rids himself by regimen and exercise, till nothing is

A Sublime Warning

left but solid muscle; and also the loose garments **Hebrews** which would entangle and beset. These answer to **xii.** self-indulgence and fastidiousness within, and to all the sinful environment which has been the ruin of innumerable souls. Thus, and not by one wild effort quickly spent, but by patience, we must run our race.

Yet not to these witnesses do we look, but unto **Looking** Him, at the goal, at once the Leader and the **unto Jesus.** Perfecter of the faith of all of them. Before Him, once, was set a weary course. But before Him was set also an unearthly joy, for which He endured the cross, despising not only the anguish but the shame of it. Therefore He now sits at the right hand of God. To consider Him, and His sufferings at the hands of men who in wronging Him sinned against themselves, this is the way to overcome our faintness.

⁴ *Not yet have ye resisted unto blood, striving against sin.* ⁵ *And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh to you as unto sons, My son despise not the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when rebuked of Him;* ⁶ *for whom the Lord loveth He disciplineth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth* (Prov. iii. 11). ⁷ *Unto discipline ye endure: as sons God dealeth with you, for what son is he whom the Father disciplineth not?* ⁸ *But if ye are without discipline whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.*

The fourth verse modifies the image: if they

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Hebrews
xii.

fainted in the race of life, how should they stand up in the deadly fight of persecution? not yet had they resisted unto blood, striving against sin, that murderous antagonist.

Chastise-
ment is
Filial.

But with this alarming image the thought relents: like a breaking clond the race-course and the gladiatorial conflict vanish; and the tried soul is in his Father's house, profiting by his Father's training. He is being 'chastened.' It is most unfortunate that no English word will give the true force of 'chastening' in this sentence, and in connection with the word 'son,' from which the Greek word in question is derived. We see at a glance the connection between the words disciple and discipline: we should at once catch the point if we read that there is no disciple without discipline. Just as close is the connection in this passage between a 'son' and the 'chastisement-of-sons'; and this compound word must be endured, if we are to appreciate the argument at all. 'My son, despise not the Lord's chastisement-of-sons.' 'Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth-as-a-son.' 'It is unto chastisement-of-sons that ye endure.' 'What son is he whom the Father doth not chasten-as-a-son?' 'If ye are without chastisement-of-sons, whereof all are partakers, then are ye not sons at all.'

And here is the true answer to 'the riddle of the painful earth.' We are not yet moulded but enduring the process; and even those evils which not only afflict but vex us, even persecution and the opposition of sinners, are measured out to us by our Father's wisdom and love.

A Sublime Warning

⁹ Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh and **Hebrews** we revered them, shall we not much rather be in **xii.** subjection to the Father of Spirits, and live? ¹⁰ And they indeed for a few days disciplined us, according to their discretion, but He for our profit, unto the partaking of His holiness. ¹¹ For all discipline for the present seemeth to be not joyous but grievous, but afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby. ¹² Wherefore, straighten the drooping hands and the feeble knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be put out of joint, but let it rather be healed.

From the nature of discipline we pass to the temper in which discipline should be endured. It should humble us. We revered the parents of 'Subjection.' our flesh: chastisement taught us to obey them: much more should we be subject to the Father of all that is high and pure in ourselves or any, the Father of Spirits. To obey Him is to live, in that full sense in which Christ said I am come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly. They disciplined us with a view to earthly advantage, the well-being of 'a few days'; and even this according to an uncertain judgment, too often swayed by impulse and caprice, but He for the only real gain, worthy of an immortal soul, to make us sharers in His holiness.

Nor need we be discouraged if we fail to realise **Natural** this, when passing through the waters and the fire. **Pain.** Affliction must be grievous at the time, for who

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Hebrews
xii.

would chastise a stone? Many a fine and really devoted soul is sorely tried by the doubt, 'Why am I cast down? why do I fail to realise that all is good?' But Christ in the garden did not rejoice. It is enough that afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness. 'Fruit' is in the singular number, as when St Paul enumerates many graces, and says 'the fruit of the Spirit is' all these, because they are a unity, all ripening on the same branch and fed with the same sap. And the order, first righteousness, then peace the fruit of this, is the same which we observed when Melchizedek was said to be first the king of righteousness and afterward king of peace. This fruit is yielded to those who are 'exercised thereby.' And this word, drawn from the gymnasia, recalls us, with admirable skill, to the point from which we started, the race, and the conflict unto blood.

We Make
the Road
we Tread.

With the twelfth verse the allusion to the games is closed. Encouraged by the love which tries us, we are to straighten the hands which are weary from the combat, and the feet from the race. We are to remember also that the conditions are to some extent of our own choosing: we who run are to make the roads level and safe, lest that which is lame be 'put out.' Does this mean 'out of the road' or 'out of joint'? The word allows either rendering; but there is no good contrast between wandering and being healed, whereas a weak limb, dislocated on a bad road, gives exactly the sense required. 'Let it rather be healed.' Only presumption risks a feeble limb upon a broken by-road.

A Sublime Warning

¹⁴ *Follow peace with all men, and the sanctification* **Hebrews**
without which no man shall see the Lord : ¹⁵ *Looking* **xii.**
diligently lest any should come short of the grace of
God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble
you, and thereby the many be defiled. ¹⁶ *Lest there be*
any fornicator, or like Esau profane person who for
one mess of meat sold his birthright, ¹⁷ *for ye know*
how that even afterward, when he would fain have
inherited the blessing, he was rejected (for he found
no place for repentance) even though he sought it
carefully with tears.

Peace, even a receding peace, is a thing to be **Peace and**
eagerly pursued. But sanctification is essential: **Holiness.**
without it no man shall see the Lord. And sancti-
fication is not mere innocence: it is the innocence of
loftier pre-occupation: it is devotion; and therefore
it is the radical foe of sensuality, against which they
are now to be warned.

Such grace should be 'pursued,' not for themselves **Public**
alone. Public spirit is a virtue, as much in the **Spirit.**
Church as in the State: all therefore should act
as overseers, lest even one should be a straggler on
the march; lest there should be among them any
root of bitterness whereby 'the many,' the congrega-
tion, should be defiled, by compromise if not by **The Sixth**
imitation; lest there should be immorality, or such **Warning.**
materialism as made Esau, for a mess of pottage,
sell the heritage of the promises. And how startling
is the development of evil: they should beware lest
there be slackness on the march, lest some root of
bitterness should germinate after its kind, lest there

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews should be among them a fornicator or a profane
xii. person bartering sacred things for a meal. Thus the recent injunction to pursue peace is modified: righteousness must not be sacrificed to harmony.

Esau. Esau is a warning of the possible consequence, even in this life, of sensual courses. He repented, but could not make his repentance effectual: he had forfeited, not his soul, of which there is no discussion, but privilege, which could never be recovered. In the nature of things it was irrevocable, like reputation when a knave is unmasked, like the health and fortune of a broken profligate, which things no contrition can recover. And who shall say at what hour it may be spoken also of the guilty soul's probation, that 'the door was shut?'

With this solemn warning, we have reached the crowning appeal of all, that astonishing contrast between the loud and flaming majesties of the Old Covenant and the soft and silent yet more awful grandeurs of the New, which is, in its sphere, without a rival or a parallel even in the inspired scriptures.

A Great Antithesis. It will be worth while first to observe the elaborate and profound antitheses, in their completeness; and afterward to examine such details as ask for comment.

We are not come to a material and a kindled fire, but unto God the Judge of all, Who is Himself consuming fire, immaterial, such as no hand has fired;—nor to the blackness and cloud and tempest in which He revealed Himself at Horeb for an hour, but to the serene city of the living God, His fixed abode, Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem;—nor to the

A Sublime Warning

shuddering crowd which besought that they might hear His voice no more, but to the exultant citizens ^{xii.} of that city, myriads of angels and the general assembly and church of the first-born;—nor to Moses, their mediator, who himself was overborne with awe, but to the Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus, and the blood of sprinkling which intercedes for us;—nor to the sound of a trumpet and the voice which shook the world, but to the same voice announcing from the skies that He is about to shake once more not earth only but also heaven,—‘once more,’ and therefore finally. But as the writer seems to announce a universal doom, his faith rises to the consciousness that only material things, things that are made, can perish, things which cannot be shaken shall remain. Let us refuse Him not, for that great Voice makes overtures to us, and if they escaped not who refused Him, treating with them upon earth, how shall we escape, if we refuse Him treating with us from heaven?

This, however, is not the conclusion at which he aims. We to whom is offered not the Palestine of the tribes, but a spiritual kingdom which even this final cataclysm cannot shake, let us accept His grace; and by this, amid the ruin of the ancient liturgies, let us render service to Him as in His temple acceptably, with reverence and awe, for while He is our God, He is also a consuming fire.

We proceed to examine the passage in detail.

¹⁸ *For ye are not come unto a material and a kindled fire, nor to blackness and darkness and*

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
xii. *tempest, ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and the Voice of words, which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. ²⁰ For they could not endure the mandate, if so much as a beast touch the mountain it shall be stoned, ²¹ and—so terrible was the appearance—Moses said I exceedingly fear and quake.*

The Sinai
Fire.

That the fire on Sinai was palpable to the bodily senses, and was not inherent in the fuel but kindled, is mentioned plainly to heighten the contrast with the invisible God, who is essential and eternal fire; but this contrast is held back to the very end, with a fine and conscious art, to crown the passage. It is also a picturesque detail, and shows with what energy the mental picture has been realised, that the mountain, entirely hidden in the darkness, is only mentioned in the proclamation forbidding it to be touched. Moreover the Jews might not 'come to' it: in all the accumulated terror this fact was the most terrible: there was first darkness and storm; then the evidence of a tremendous personal force, the trumpet and the Voice; but what they found intolerable was that this great Being sternly repelled them.

Some tradition which has not come down to us is accepted in the words 'Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.' The notion that they are misapplied from his declaration, 'I was afraid of the anger . . . wherewith the Lord was wroth against you' (Deut. ix. 19), is only important because that passage bears valuable testimony to his state of mind. Their sin, he tells them, and his dread of the consequence, led

A Sublime Warning

to his forty days of fast. Is it not natural to believe Hebrews that he, knowing their waywardness, was alarmed **xii.** already?

²² But ye are come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, a heavenly Jerusalem, ²³ and to myriads, a festive assembly of angels and church of the first-born enrolled in heaven.

While Israel was repelled so sternly from the mountain, we have actually come to Mount Zion, wherein is the city of God and His abode, not to the wild and desert mountain scene of His temporary appearance.

The 'general assembly' of the next clause is a phrase taken from the Greek festivals. But whether it refer to the angels or to the Church is a much disputed question. Are we come to myriads, a festive assembly of angels and Church of the first-born? Or to myriads of angels, and a festive assembly and Church of the first-born? In any case the effect is greatly to heighten the joyous tone of the whole passage. But the first explanation deepens the contrast between the dispensation of angels, stern and terrible, and the 'festive assembly' which shares the joy of man. 'The Church of the first-born' glances back perhaps at Esau and those who like him would sell their birthright: these have kept it; and their names are in the book of life.

²³ And to God the Judge of all, and to the Spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus the

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews xii. *Mediator of a new Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better than that of Abel.*

‘To God the Judge of all’: as yet the tone is scarcely at all changed to admonition; and therefore he promptly adds that with the Judge are ‘the spirits of just men made perfect,’—which means, as it does throughout the epistle ‘completed’ in the sense indicated by the context. They are not yet made perfect as regards their hope (xi. 40), as regards their course they are.

And, much more reassuring still, we are come to Jesus in His benignant office of Mediator, and since He appears for us by virtue of His blood, this is separately mentioned, as a distinct source of reassurance.¹

The Seventh
Warning.

²⁵ See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, who refused Him that warned them upon earth, much more shall not we escape, refusing Him Who warneth from heaven. ²⁶ Whose voice then shook the earth; but now hath He promised saying, Yet once more I make to tremble not only earth but also heaven (Hag. ii. 6). ²⁷ And this ‘yet once more’ manifests the removal of the things shaken as of things made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Wherefore, receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, through which we may perform service acceptably to God with reverence and fear; ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

¹ This is the obvious intention of the clause: to press it further, as some devout commentators have done, appears quite unnecessary, and very far from spiritual in its tendency.

A Sublime Warning

The Jews literally refused Him who spake, by Hebrews desiring that His voice should not speak any more ^{xii.} to them. It was the same alienated and alienating disposition which threatened to turn their descendants away from Christ. And we are asked, How shall we escape in the act of behaving thus; for either 'we are come unto' Him in glad communion, or else we are wilfully rejecting Him. It was an age of such revolutionary change that the prophecy of Haggai was felt to apply to it: 'now' hath He promised. And the triumph of faith which regards this prediction as a 'promise' may be measured by contrasting this glad expression with the whole tone of hymns like the *Dies Iræ*. As we receive Him we receive a kingdom. But we do not cease to revere nor to minister to Him (for so the word means) remembering that while He is our God He is also in His essence a fire, in which all that is unworthy must be consumed.

HEBREWS XIII

1. Let brotherly love continue.
2. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers : for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
3. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them ; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.
4. Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled : but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.
5. Let your conversation be without covetousness ; and be content with such things as ye have : for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.
6. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.
7. Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God : whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.
8. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.
9. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace ; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.
10. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.
11. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.
12. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.
13. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.
14. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.
15. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.
16. But to do good and to communicate forget not ; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.
17. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls, as they that must give

Hebrews xiii

account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

18. Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

19. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

20. Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.

21. Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

22. And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words.

23. Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you.

24. Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you.

25. Grace be with you all. Amen.

XIII

CLOSING ADMONITIONS

Hebrews
xiii.

Homely
Precepts.

This chapter is scarcely what a great authority has called it, 'a kind of appendix' to the Epistle. The writer would certainly have reckoned it essential, for in it the high and solemn warnings of the last chapter, which brought the whole argument to a close, as each section had been closed in turn, are made to bear upon the homely and daily experience of his readers. For want of just that pressure upon the conscience which it supplies, many a storm of lofty Christian eloquence spends itself in vain.

The first six verses are concerned with our relations to our fellow-men ; the central portion of the chapter treats of our religious duties ; and it closes with an intimately personal note, and a benediction.

¹ *Let brotherly love continue.* ² *Forget not hospitality, for thereby some have even entertained angels unaware.*

³ *Remember the prisoners as fellow-prisoners, and the evil-entreated as being yourselves also in the body.*

⁴ *Let marriage be honourable in all things and the bed be undefiled ; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.* ⁵ *Be free from the love of money, content with such things as ye have, for He hath Himself said I will never fail thee, nor in any wise*

Closing Admonitions

forsake thee. 'So that we are bold to say the Lord Hebrews is my helper: I will not fear: what shall man do unto me?' **xiii.**

Brotherly love comes first because in it is the germ of every other social grace: it works no ill to its neighbour, and is therefore the fulfilling of the law. But the expression used conveys a suggestion that at least it was in danger. The tendency to 'draw back' into Judaism would itself produce as well as indicate a certain estrangement from one's fellow-Christians, a mutual coldness and distrust. But they are commanded to let it continue, because our affections are, more than we commonly reflect, in our own power: we may cultivate them, or by neglect and the harbouring of unjust suspicion kill them.

Next comes hospitality. The earliest books of Christian exhortation are full of directions for this grace; which indeed was of especial importance when the children of a persecuted faith, easy to be detected by strangers, were thrown entirely upon their fellow-believers for shelter and encouragement as they journeyed. Circumstances have changed, but duties have not been abolished. There are young people adrift in our cities, and those, of whom Christ spoke, who 'cannot recompense' us. And in befriending these we may do more than entertain angels. For He Himself will say to us at last Ye did it unto Me.

Hospitality is for the free. But they lived in a time of persecution. Some were 'in bonds'; and even the great and strong Apostle Paul had felt

Duty
towards
Men.

Love.

Hospitality.

Them that
are in
Bonds.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews it a bitter aggravation of his trial that 'no man
xiii. stood by' him. They were not to behave so dastardly but to reckon themselves sharers in the bonds of the persecuted, as truly as if they too were under arrest, and called upon for a brave avowal of their faith. When others were evil-entreated they should remember their own weakness, 'as in the body,' not as an excuse for sheltering themselves from danger, but to strengthen their sympathy with their brother's pain. In the tenth chapter they were reminded that when first enlightened they had actually suffered thus, not only being themselves made an exhibition in bonds and afflictions but also becoming partners with those who were so treated.

That we are in the body is a two sided truth : it makes the coward shrink from any connection with suffering ; but it makes the good man kind by his very sensibility to pain. It is a quiet but a noble mark of character, that this writer invokes it as an incentive to them to stand by their brethren, evil-entreated for the cross.

The Flesh. It is but a step, from the softness which refuses to suffer with others, to the softness of self-indulgence degrading others. Therefore purity is mentioned next ; and, in the midst of dissolute races, with no public opinion to keep them undefiled, they are reminded that their Judge is God. His name is in the place of emphasis. Little it matters that the Time-spirit is insolent and gross, if once the eye of faith has caught sight of the true Judge, standing at the door.

The next precept concerns not our social relations,

Closing Admonitions

but the state of our own soul. Let your frame of mind, your habitual condition (for so he means) be free from covetousness, content with such things as ye have. It seems a modest requirement, but it leads far. The way to be content is to have faith in God. He has given us a double promise never to cease from the support of our weakness with a sustaining hand, never to be so far away that an appeal should be unheard, or the approach of an adversary unobserved. So then the craving for material resources which is at the root of mammon worship is really distrust of Him. Desire for what is not given us is a revolt against His decision. Who knows what we truly need, and has promised it. Therefore we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper: I will not fear: what can man do to me? Thus the whole life of faith is linked together, and the lowliest Christian grace involves it all.

Hebrews
xiii.
Covetous
ness.

⁷ Remember them that had the rule over you, such as spake unto you the word of God, and considering the close of their life follow their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea, and for ever. ⁹ Be not carried about by divers and strange teachings, for it is good that the heart be established by grace, not by meats wherein they that busied themselves were not profited. ¹⁰ We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. ¹¹ For those beasts of which the blood is brought for sin into the holy places by the high priest, of these the bodies are burned without the camp. ¹² Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
xiii.

people through His own blood, suffered without the gate. ¹³ Let us therefore go forth to Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek the coming one. ¹⁵ Through Him therefore let us offer a sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, the fruit of lips which confess His name. ¹⁶ But to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. ¹⁷ Obey them that have the rule over you, for they watch for your souls as they who must give account, that they may do this with joy and not sorrowfully, unprofitable for you were this.

Lost
Leaders.

The Hebrews have been led from duty to religion (vers. 7-17) from contentment to reliance upon God. And now they are reminded of leaders who have passed away; some like Stephen and James by martyrdom, all of them so that the triumph of their faith was manifest. Such victory has always been at once an evidence and an inspiration. 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church' said one of the earliest apologists. It was said of Hamilton, burned on a hill-top as a conspicuous warning, that it would be wiser to burn the next in a cellar, for the 'reek of his burning had infected Scotland.' But we need not assume that only tragic deaths are thought of here. A living missionary writes that no one will ever again talk of the pity of disturbing picturesque native beliefs, who has seen the difference between a Christian and a pagan funeral. Every holy life

Closing Admonitions

resigned with calmness, conscious of the trackless **Hebrews** ocean to which one sails, but also conscious of His **xiii.** presence who rebukes the waves when they arise, all lives and deaths which are a harmony of praise to God are evidences, good to remember. Very solemn and magnificent, very instructive and inspiring is that death which is the result of a holy life, the outcome of habitual fellowship with God. We are bidden to look on it with so attentive a gaze that scripture uses the word again, only of Paul's anxious inspection of the devotions of the men of Athens (Acts xvii. 23).

And for ourselves we are to remember that our deaths will be the outcome of our lives, and may be an inspiration to those who follow us.

We are to imitate our forerunners, not in the details of their behaviour, but in the faith which inspired them, and will inspire us also according to our circumstances. For Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea, and for ever. Many centuries have since gone by, and we, more confidently than they by added ages of experience, can attest that He is so. Chinese martyrs have been as brave in His strength as those whom Nero or Diocletian slew. And He is by the death-beds of believers still as truly as when the Gospel was fresh and young. That Jesus Christ is the same for us and them is the motive power of the Christian faith. And as, on the one hand, no dogma is enough to hold, without a personal grasp of our loving Lord, so on the other, it may be that souls are in vital contact with Him who have not yet apprehended much that helps and

Christ is the
Same for us.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews animates us. The Eleventh Chapter, which celebrates
xiii. the faith of Abraham and Moses, recognizes that of Rahab also.

We too
must be
Stable.

From the mention of God Who will never leave us nor forsake us (ver. 5) the thought has advanced to the immutability of Christ. And thence we are led swiftly forward to our own duty, who also must be stable, not carried about by divers and strange teachings. By grace the heart is to be made firm and strong; by the holy influences which come down 'as the rain and the snow from heaven' which we can ask for but cannot earn. And as Christ said 'by their fruits ye shall know them' so here the appeal is to experience. Men had tried the other plan, the Mosaic rule of life, a self-righteous observance of ritual, distinctions of lawful and unlawful meats. But, while they had not been profited, it is good to be established by grace.

'We have
an Altar.'

It is one of the most Pauline transitions in this book, and by far the boldest and most dramatic, which passes from the mention of clean and unclean meats, to that of the altar whence only the Christian has a right to eat.

'You think,' it seems to say, 'that we have nothing to set against those sacred feasts wherein the priests ate of the sacrifices. But we have'—such is the emphasis—'we have what you deny to us. The contrast is entirely in our favour. Of some sacrifices it is true that they eat who serve the tabernacle. But of some they dare not, and it is of just such a sacrifice that we, the true servants of God, partake.' All the greater sacrifices, all those of which the blood

Closing Admonitions

is formally presented before God, of these the flesh **Hebrews** is burned outside the camp. On the day of Atone- **xiii.** ment, the blood of both the sacrifices was carried into the Holy of Holies. Not there, but yet in the Holy Place, the blood of the sin-offerings, whether for a priest or for the assembly, was presented. Of the flesh of all such offerings the priest was forbidden to partake, all were most carefully and thoroughly consumed by fire (Lev. xvi. 27, iv. 11 and 21).

Now the argument of this whole Epistle is that the Blood of the true Sacrifice has been presented in the true temple by the true Priest for us. And yet He says, My flesh is meat indeed; and again, in the crowning act of Christian worship, Take, eat, this is My Body.

The Cross of Christ was the altar where the one sacrifice for sin was consummated, and whence His blood was borne into the skies. All other references are at the most secondary and symbolic; and by going straight on to speak of the place where the cross was planted outside the gate the meaning is put beyond dispute. Thence, as from an altar, He gives us His flesh to eat—His pure and deathless humanity to overcome the fallen and the foul in ours, until we can say I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. It was because the sins of men were laid on the sin-offering, that it was unfit for food, nor within the camp might they so much as burn it; its expulsion was its 'reproach.'

**His
Reproach.**

Now the Lord had laid upon Christ the iniquity of us all. But since He was Priest as well as Victim,

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
xiii.

and in His Body was to conquer death, no strict parallel for this ignominious destruction of the sin-offering was even conceivable. The absence of this was His glory, Whose bearing of our sins in His own Body was so far from polluting or degrading Him that it made Him for ever the true Bread of souls. And yet we are bidden to find something analogous to this banishment of the body of the sin-offering in His suffering 'without the gate, that He might sanctify the people by His own Blood.' This was His 'reproach'; and those Jewish converts were bidden to share it by quitting, for His sake, the Hebrew city and temple and ceremonialism. The form of such an exhortation may have been superseded (though its spirit lives on always) when once the Jewish polity was dissolved. But yet wherever a jibe or a taunt, a loss or an estrangement, is well borne for Christ it is His reproach we share, the same in its humble measure which He first endured for us. Thus we read a while ago, that when Moses refused the treasures of Egypt it was for 'the reproach of Christ' that he did this (xi. 26). But there is a closer parallel than this. Abraham, as we saw, was content to dwell in tents in the promised land, far from its towers and palaces, because he looked for the city which had the foundations (xi. 10). And we profess the faith of Abraham: we also confess that we have no abiding city upon earth, but expect the city which is coming—the same which St John beheld coming down out of heaven from God. With such a theory of life, and such a hope, ought we to find it hard to resign for Christ the fellowships and

Closing Admonitions

friendships of the world, to go forth out of the gates **Hebrews**
to Him, bearing His reproach? **xiii.**

For, He Himself is there. The Priest in heaven, **With Him.**
the Victim on the altar, He is also our living
Captain and Guide: His presence leads His people
on: He awaits us outside the gate: and all petty
shames conquered and base limitations overpassed
bring us nearer to the King, Whose kingdom and
Whose city we expect.

Can we wonder that we are exhorted to perpetual **Praise.**
thanksgiving? This, he seems to say, is the New
Testament ritual, it is what Hosea called the
sacrifice of 'bullocks even our lips' praising Him
(xiv. 2). To know our privilege, who have Christ
for our Priest, and our Provision, and our Leader, this
is to be grateful indeed; and it is the best security
against the murmuring heart which would turn back
to Judaism, as Israel would have turned back to
Egypt.

Such a heart will readily serve its brothers, who **Brotherli-**
are partakers of the same hope. At the most, it **ness.**
needs gently to be reminded. To render all sorts
of kindness, and to 'communicate' (in the exact
sense of that English word, which is, to regard what
is our own as held in trust for others), these are
duties not to be forgotten: no ecstasy of worship
may so absorb us as to push them out of mind.
Nay, these, as really as the praise of our lips, are
'sacrifices' well-pleasing to God. Was it His
honour then, or only our own joy, that we sought
in any emotion which would overshadow them?

As the section began (ver. 7) so it ends, with

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
xiii.
Their
Leaders.

mention of their leaders. Then they were bidden to remember those who had passed away : now they are to be obedient to the injunctions and tractable to the wishes of their successors. Sleepless, as the shepherd when the wolf is prowling round the fold, such is the phrase which describes their watch for souls ; and as the Church is thus exhorted, surely they themselves are searched and stirred. They must give account. Ezekiel's denunciation of the evil shepherds, and our Lord's of the hireling, both will apply to them if they are faithless (Ezek. xxxiv. 7-10 ; John x. 10-12). Nay, the flock must suffer if their watch, though vigilant, be joyless and discouraged, through their wilfulness. But a congregation, a parish, is often far more responsible than it suspects for a dull and ineffective pastorate. And then it suffers the penalty in its own spiritual shortcoming : 'Unprofitable were that for you !' Now who can read a passage like this, and doubt the scriptural foundation for a stated and authoritative ministry ? We obey them as we obey our parents and governors. But as our submission to a sovereign or a father is not absolute, but only while it does not clash with our obedience to Christ, so it is with these : obedience is due to them 'in the Lord.'

¹⁸ *Pray for us, for we trust that we have an upright conscience in all things willing to walk uprightly.*

¹⁹ *But I more abundantly exhort you to do this, that I may the sooner be restored to you.*

'Pray for us.' The transition is natural, from their duty to their pastors, to their duty to him, who is in the act of teach-

Closing Admonitions

ing them, who had probably ministered among them in the past, and now desires to be restored to them. Those others he declared to be the sleepless watchers for their souls; but of himself he speaks much more modestly: 'We trust . . . we desire,' even if human frailty at times betray us. It is an echo of St Paul's words, 'I know nothing against myself, yet am I not thereby justified, but He that judgeth me is the Lord' (1 Cor. iv. 4). But on the plea of his earnestness he asks for their prayers, as the great apostle had said to obscure and long-forgotten saints, 'Ye also helping together by your prayers for us' (2 Cor. i. 11). To-day, as we think of great missionaries or powerful leaders of the Church at home, and our hearts go out to them, our prayers also should go up for them to God. The Church is an organism; and if we are doubtful of our own function in it, of this at least we may be certain, that we can pray. Intercession, moreover, is often its own reward; and it is when we pray for others that our hearts are softened and set free, to confess our own sins and obtain grace for our own necessities.

Nor is it only nor chiefly for his own sake that he makes this request of them. Praying for him they would be also praying for themselves, that he might be restored to them the sooner.

²⁰ Now the God of Peace, Who brought up from among the dead, in the blood of an everlasting covenant, the Shepherd of the sheep, that great Shepherd, even our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ Make you complete in every good thing unto the working of His will,

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews
xiii. *working within you what is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to Whom be the glory unto the ages of the ages. Amen.*

His Prayer
for Them.

Would they make him welcome when he returned? Would they be obedient to their leaders as he had enjoined? It is his turn to intercede for them, whose prayers he had so recently desired. From the discords of earth he looks up to the God of Peace, the Author and the Lover of harmony. Behind all earthly shepherds he discerns the Shepherd indeed, the good Shepherd Who gave His life for the sheep, Whom God brought again from the grave, not as if His death were merely abrogated, but with all its purpose achieved, with the Blood of an Everlasting Covenant in His hand. To that God, working through that Redeemer, he solemnly appeals on their behalf.

As they read, their thoughts were thrown back upon the New Covenant of the Eighth Chapter, and the efficacious Blood of the Ninth. Nowhere is the appeal against Judaism more emphatic, the contrast between the two systems more impressive than in this final prayer. The law made nothing perfect; but they may be complete in service. God Himself will work in them through Jesus Christ, Who is here, almost for the first time, shown as working upon us, and not only for us and on our behalf.

²² *But I beseech you, brethren, bear with the word of this exhortation, for I have written briefly to you.*

²³ *Know ye that our brother Timothy is released, with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you.* ²⁴ *Salute all*

Closing Admonitions

your leaders and all the saints. They of Italy salute you. ²⁵ *Grace be with you. Amen.* Hebrews xiii.

There is a great charm in the close of most of the Epistles, the charm of simple interests, the release of a prisoner, the prospect of a visit, the salutation of friends unknown to us. 'They of Italy,' that mysterious group pique our curiosity and baffle it. The declaration, at the close of an argument so elaborate and sustained, that he has written briefly compared with the greatness of the subject, is attractive, and so is his anxiety that his readers may not resent what he has said to them. We recognise the simplicity and straightforwardness of this fine intelligence. The mighty thoughts which he has unfolded to us are more real, and impress us more vividly, for this parting touch of nature which makes him kin with us. Lastly, we feel as though we shared his brief and final benediction. 'Grace be with you'—namely the free and unbought blessedness and help which are the glory of the New Testament, and come to us from its Lord. For wherever the description of this blessing is expanded, it is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.'





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